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AN: This is going to, hopefully, be the only time I'll put an Author's Note at the top of a chapter. The reason I'm doing it is to explain something. At the beginning of this chapter, I've got two extra things. The first is the italics, and it's sort of a prologue or an introduction to the entire story. The bold, which is next, is a preface, or a scene further down in the series (the third story, to be exact) that will come up again, but it won't make much sense until later on in this story. Now, I'm done talking, so read, enjoy, and review! :)

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Life may seem to be set in stone, but it isn't. Choices, events, and little things can change the future. The smallest thing like turning left instead of right, or helping someone pick up something, or even the choice of where to sit can change a life. The world is made up little changes that add up to big things, not big things that are surrounded by little things.

Sometimes it's the smallest choices that can change a story, the smallest actions that set off a new chain reaction. One small decision, which leads to many small actions, can change not only events but people as well. The tiniest things can make the largest differences in life.

This story is no exception. One little choice, the choice to ask a question that went unasked before, led to a different action than before, which led to a brand new story for one Harry James Potter...

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Harry stood just inside the tree line of the clearing where Voldemort and his Death Eaters awaited him; if he was going to show up, that was.

While watching Voldemort and his followers, Harry was having an internal battle. He didn't know if he should just walk into the clearing

and face death even though Dumbledore had told him that he was a Horcrux and would have to die so that Voldemort would be mortal.

Harry knew he had another ten minutes to decide, but he just didn't know what to do.

Shifting beneath his Invisibility Cloak, Harry fingered the dagger that had been through so much with him and had been a huge asset in everything he did. His other hand grasped the handle of his holly wand, the one that was a brother to Voldemort's yew wand.

Then, Harry's right pocket heated up, no doubt Daphne trying to get him to talk so that she could try one last time to stop him, even though no one could stop the upcoming event once he walked into that clearing, if he did. That one thing reminded Harry what he was fighting for, who he was fighting for.

Every student, from Slytherin to Gryffindor to Ravenclaw to Hufflepuff, from first year to seventh, was counting on him. The Order of the Phoenix was counting on him. Families of his friends needed him to do this so that they could be safe and without fear that a Death Eater could turn up at their door and kill them at any given moment. Those still good in the Ministry needed him to stop Voldemort so that the Ministry could be fixed.

Most important in Harry's mind, though, was that if he did this, Ginny would be able to live her life without fear or the chance of her family being killed by terrorists.

Looking down at his robes beneath his Cloak, Harry found it amusing that he was going to go stand up to Lord Voldemort, the heir of Slytherin, while wearing Slytherin-colored robes and with the Dagger on his waist.

Even if Harry did die, Harry knew that it would mean someone else could finally kill Tom Marvolo Riddle, but he had a feeling Dumbledore had something up his sleeve.

Sighing internally, Harry made sure he was in shadow before slipping off his Cloak and putting it into the pocket of his robes that didn't have his burning-hot Journal in it.

Quickly contemplating taking out his Journal and leaving it so that everyone could hear what happened in the forest clearing, Harry sighed slightly and slipped it out. Opening it and activating it, Harry put his pencil into place before pulling out the leather cord around his neck and attaching the Journal to it. Shrinking the journal, Harry slipped it under his shirt and sighed lightly, knowing that his friends would all quickly find out he was signed on and would be reading the journal like it was a lifeline.

Before he could change his mind, Harry James Potter, seventeen years old, wearing Slytherin-colored robes, a dagger hanging on his side, and his wand in its holster, walked out into the clearing and stared Lord Voldemort, the heir of Slytherin and the darkest Dark Lord ever seen, right in the eyes, knowing that this might be the last thing he ever saw in a few minutes.

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Chapter One

Harry James Potter looked out the window of his compartment on the Hogwarts Express in Platform 9¾, watching the other students and their families say goodbye for the term. Harry saw people in robes ranging from navy blue, to black, to blood red. He saw people who were obviously Muggles as they were in Muggle clothes and looked out of place in the sea of witches and wizards, looking lost and unusual.

Harry closed his eyes, turning away from the window, and thought about the events that had led to him finally being gone from the Dursleys. Letters had gone to his aunt and uncle's house for days, finally driving his uncle crazy enough that he took them away from home until they ended up at a broken-down house on an island, during the middle of a storm. Then, Hagrid, a big man, had broken into the house and given Harry his letter, finally convincing him that he was indeed a wizard. The next month was spent out of the way of his family until today, September 1st, when they agreed to take him to King's Cross, where they left him at ten in the morning.

Harry had been thankful that he had thought to ask Hagrid how he was to get to Hogwarts, a school for witches and wizards, as he probably would have never found the hidden entrance without Hagrid's instructions. He then worked hard until he finally got his

trunk onto the train and into a compartment, sitting down by the window with his hair covering his forehead carefully.

You see, Harry James Potter wasn't an ordinary wizard. Until a month ago, he had thought himself to be an ordinary boy with no parents. Then, he found out that his parents had been murdered by an evil wizard named Lord Voldemort, leaving Harry with only a lightning bolt-shaped scar on his forehead and the title 'the Boy-Who-Lived' after Voldemort had turned his wand on Harry, intending to kill the one-year-old and failing, supposedly losing his own life in the process.

Harry had learned on his trip to Diagon Alley, the alley where shops were for witches and wizards, hidden in London, that his scar made him stand out. He had decided to change into his new, black school robes the moment he got on the train and then hide his scar with his black, unruly hair, trying not to stand out. So far, his plan had been successful.

Before too long, it was eleven o'clock, the whistles were blowing, and the Hogwarts Express was leaving the station, finally taking Harry to Hogwarts and away from his old life with the Dursleys.

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Harry was watching London pass by when a group of kids in robes with blue lining on them came into the compartment and asked him if they could sit with him. Harry told them they could and then went back to looking out of the window, basically ignoring the older children. He didn't want anyone to realize who he was, preferring to stay unnoticed until he was forced to name himself. Luckily for him, the older kids didn't mind and left him to himself, talking among themselves about their different summers.

The only time Harry looked away from the window the entire train ride was to buy food for lunch when the trolley came around, only buying enough to satisfy his hunger. Otherwise, he spent hours just watching the land speed by him as he enjoyed his freedom from the Dursleys for the first time since he had been a year old and left on their doorstep after his parents had been murdered.

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Harry stared up at the magnificent castle in front of him as the boats sailed across the lake, unable to believe his eyes. He couldn't believe that he was going to be staying in such an amazing place for ten months of each of the next seven years. He thought he had to be dreaming; this couldn't be his new home.

Looking around at the other first years, he realized that he wasn't the only one with this reaction. Almost every first year was staring at the castle in front of them; the few who weren't were looking around like Harry for other reactions. Harry went back to staring at the stone castle until they finally got to the other side of the lake and were led up to the doors where Hagrid knocked on the doors three times. They opened to show a tall, black-haired witch in emerald-green robes with a stern face.

"The first years, Professor McGonagall," Hagrid said.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here."

The woman, Professor McGonagall, led them through an Entrance Hall that could hold the Dursley's entire house, it was so huge. She led them past a doorway that had hundreds of voices talking behind it to a small, empty chamber off the Hall, which they crowded into.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," Professor McGonagall said once they were all in the room. "The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your Houses. The Sorting is a very serious ceremony because, while you are here, your House will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your House, sleep in your House dormitory, and spend free time in your House Common Room.

"The four Houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each House has its own noble history and has produced outstanding witches and wizards. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn your House points, while any rule-breaking will lose House points. At the end of the year, the House with the most points is awarded the house cup, a great honor. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever House becomes yours.

"The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few minutes in front of the rest of the school. I suggest you all smarten yourselves up as

much as you can while you are waiting. I will return when we are ready for you. Please wait quietly."

She left the chamber and Harry snuck into the shadows at the back of the room, using his dark hair and robes to his advantage. He then began trying to think about what the Sorting might be, but his thoughts were cut short when he heard his name being spoken.

"-Potter supposed to be here this year?" a red-haired boy asked a black-haired boy.

"I think so. He's supposed to be eleven this year, if I remember correctly," the boy replied.

"Then why isn't he here?" the red-haired boy asked while looking around the room, never noticing Harry lurking in the shadows, listening to their conversation.

"Because, Weasley, he probably feels that he's too special to come to Hogwarts and went to another school instead," a blond boy said as he walked up to the pair, two boys that looked like gorillas flanking him.

"What do you mean, Malfoy?" the red-haired boy, Weasley, spat out.

"I mean that he's rich and famous, so why bother coming to a dump like this? I'd have gone somewhere else, but mother wanted me close to home, you see," Malfoy said.

"Sod off, Malfoy," Weasley said, turning away from the blond boy.

"Make me, Weasley," Malfoy said, egging him on. "I mean, it's not like you have any money or anything. Your second-hand robes are proof of that. I'll bet you have nothing to make you anything better than a Mudblood."

Weasley turned around so fast you could barely see him move, and was on top of Malfoy before anyone could react. Harry watched in amazement as Weasley began punching Malfoy in the face, breaking his nose and covering them both in blood.

No one else in the room moved or spoke, afraid to get hurt or in trouble. Of course, the other first years had the right idea of not

getting involved as just after the fight had started, and before Malfoy could get Weasley back, Professor McGonagall came back into the room.

"What is the meaning of this?" she yelled, making every student in the room look at her and stopping the fight in its tracks. "Fighting on the first day of school, before the Sorting Ceremony has even begun! You both should be ashamed of yourselves! Your families will be written to, and the Headmaster will be involved in this. Be relieved that we cannot take points from a House before you have been sorted, nor for anything happening before the Feast is over, or you'd both be losing a lot of points for your future Houses."

The angry professor moved forward, pulling her wand out as she did, and pulled the two boys off of each other. Then, with a few waves of her wand, she cleaned both boys off and healed Malfoy's nose. She glared at both boys before gesturing for all of the students to follow her. No one noticed as Harry slipped out of the shadows and merged into the middle of the group, trying to act as if he'd been there the entire time.

The group entered the Great Hall in a line, and they were awed by what they found. Thousand of candles, all hanging over four long tables full of students and one shorter table of teachers, lit the room. The tables had golden goblets and plates, all shining brilliantly in the light from the candles. Above them, the ceiling looked like the night sky outside. Harry heard a brown-haired girl muttering about it being enchanted.

The first years were led to the long table where the teachers sat. A stool was waiting for them in front of it, an old, dirty, pointed hat sitting upon it. Everyone from the older students, to the teachers, to the pearly white ghosts above the tables was looking at the hat, so the first years did as well. They weren't disappointed as they saw the hat move and a mouth form on it before it began to sing.

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,
But don't judge me on what you see,
I'll eat myself if you can find
A smarter hat than me.
You can keep your bowlers black,
Your top hats sleek and tall,
For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat,

And I can cap them all.
There's nothing hidden in your head
The Sorting Hat can't see,
So try me on and I will tell you
Where you ought to be.
You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve, and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;
You might belong in Hufflepuff,
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
And unafraid of toil;
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,
If you've a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You'll make your real friends,
Those cunning folk use any means
To achieve their ends.
So put me on! Don't be afraid!
And don't get in a flap!
You're in safe hands (though I have none)
For I'm a Thinking Cap!"

Everyone clapped for the hat as it bowed to each of the houses before going still once more. After the clapping was done, most of the first years started talking to their friends about their relief at that being the Sorting. Harry, on the other hand, tried to guess which House he'd be in as he didn't really know which House he fit the best. He still hadn't decided when Professor McGonagall stepped forward with a roll of parchment in her hands.

"When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be Sorted," she said. "Abbot, Hannah!"

Harry watched as Hannah was sorted into Hufflepuff, followed by a Susan Bones. He watched Terry Boot become the first Ravenclaw, followed by Mandy Broklehurst. Lavender Brown became the first Gryffindor and Millicent Bulstrode became the first Slytherin, drawing boos from the crowd for some reason, and Tracey Davis got the same reaction. Justin Finch-Fletchley became a Hufflepuff, and

Harry began to lose interest as he watched Seamus Finnigan become a Gryffindor, followed by the brown-haired girl from in line, Hermione Granger. Harry thought he heard the red-haired boy, Weasley, groan at her Sorting, though he had no idea why. Neville Longbottom, the black-haired boy Weasley had been talking to, became a Gryffindor, and then he forgot he had to take the hat off, so he had to run back to give it to the next person.

After that, Harry lost interest until the name Draco Malfoy was said and the blond boy swaggered up to the stool. The hat barely touched his head before declaring him a Slytherin. Malfoy went to sit with the two boys who had been flanking him before, Crabbe and Goyle, at the Slytherin table, definitely happy with himself.

Harry only started to pay attention again when the Ps came. He watches as Parkinson was Sorted into Slytherin, one of the Patil twins into Ravenclaw with the other going to Gryffindor, and he didn't even listen for the sorting of Perks as he had a feeling he was next. Sure enough the next name said was "Potter, Harry!"

As Harry finally made his presence known to the whole school, people began whispering and trying to get a good look at him. As the hat was dropped over his eyes, just as it had for every other first year Sorted, he saw everyone craning to get a good look at him. He just stared at the black of the hat and waited, willing to be patient for his Sorting.

"Hmm," said a small voice in his ear. "Difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind either. There's talent, oh my goodness, yes – and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that's interesting... So where shall I put you?"

Wherever you'd like to put me, Harry thought in his head, guessing the Sorting Hat would pick up on the thought. I just want to be in the best place for me, no matter what others might think of it.

"That's very interesting... Well, then, I'd better choose the house that will help you on the way to greatness. As you don't seem to have any sort of bias in your mind, something I like about you, I think I'll put you in SLYTHERIN!"

Harry lifted the hat off his head as the Sorting Hat finished saying his House to the Hall and was greeted with pure and utter silence.

Every single person in the Hall was staring at him in disbelief, unable to believe that Harry Potter, the Harry Potter, was sorted into Slytherin. Not even the Slytherins, nor their Head of House, could believe it.

Harry turned around to see masks of shock on every teacher's face, even the one in the special chair that looked like a throne in the middle. Gulping slightly, Harry put the hat down and slowly walked towards the table with the students in green and silver. Every eye in the Hall was still on him, following his movement as he went to his House's table. Even after he had sat down, no one could stop looking at him.

Harry looked down at his watch in a way that it didn't look like he was looking at it. He waited after that and didn't look at his watch again until the professor in the throne-like chair actually moved, telling him that someone had finally gotten over whatever his Sorting had done to shock everyone. His watch told him it had taken five minutes for anyone to actually react, which was a surprise for him.

"Professor McGonagall, please continue with the Sorting," the professor in the throne-like chair said, snapping everyone out of their stupor.

"Of course, Professor Dumbledore," she replied, slowly continuing the Sorting.

While the Sorting finished up, people kept looking at Harry, making him very nervous and uncomfortable. Harry only paid enough attention to the Sorting to hear that Weasley's first name was Ronald and that he had become a Gryffindor. Another boy, Blaise Zabini, joined Harry at the Slytherin table, sitting next to him on his left and looking at him only for a moment before looking up towards the head table and Professor Dumbledore, the Headmaster.

"Welcome!" Albus Dumbledore, who had stood up, said. "Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!"

Food appeared in front of Harry as Dumbledore sat down and most of the Hall clapped for him. Harry dug right in, having never so much food in his life and wanting to enjoy what he could of it. He grabbed

some of everything in front of him and began to eat while hearing his classmates around him talk, though they were actually talking to him.

"Potter, how did you get into Slytherin?" Malfoy asked him, a sneer on his face.

"The Sorting Hat put me here," Harry replied, not wishing to give anything away but still wanting the questioning to end.

"Yes, yes, we all saw that, but everyone thought you'd be a bloody Gryffindor for sure. I mean, you're obviously light and all."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Potter, don't tell me you don't understand what you being in Slytherin means," Blaise Zabini drawled from next to him, a sneer on his face.

"Uh... Sorry, but I don't."

"You don't?" Daphne Greengrass said from across the table, shock covering her face along with all the other first years around them, though she quickly wiped it off her face.

Harry shook his head as he replied, "This is truthfully my first day in the wizarding world except for the day I got my supplies. Someone left me with some bloody awful Muggles for most of my life. I truly hate them, though I'm not sure about Muggles in general. The ones I'm related too are bloody bastards, though."

All of his classmates stared at him in disbelief while he ate another bite of his fried chicken, waiting for a response that wasn't going to come right away. None of his classmates could believe that the Harry Potter had grown up as a Muggle, having no idea about the wizarding world. Everyone had expected him to have grown up with some light family for his entire life.

"Are you telling me that you didn't grow up knowing about the wizarding world?" Malfoy asked in disbelief. Harry just nodded as his mouth was still full. "Well, then, all of us here in Slytherin, we can help you make the right choices." The others all around him nodded in agreement, some more reluctantly than others.

Harry cocked his head, deep in thought. To him, he could see some of these people being helpful like Blaise Zabini, Tracey Davis, and Daphne Greengrass, but Millicent Bulstrode, Pansy Parkinson, Crabbe, and Goyle seemed anything but helpful. Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott were the two he definitely wasn't sure about as Draco definitely seemed like the type who used others and Nott just seemed... very sly for some reason. Those two would take a while to decide about.

"I'll take advice," Harry finally said, "but the final choices regarding things I do are always going to be my own." To Harry's surprise, all of the other Slytherins nodded happily, small smiles coming to their faces while they all shared looks.

"Very good, Potter," Daphne said. "You just told us why the Sorting Hat placed you in Slytherin. You think ambitiously, yet you're cautious and sly, hard to catch. You definitely belong here, unlike what most of us would have thought."

"I must agree with Greengrass on this one," Blaise said from beside Harry, making him turn to look at him. "You most certainly think like a Slytherin."

"I think I could grow to like you, Potter," Malfoy said from beside him, though Harry barely noticed.

"One question for all of you," Harry said as he realized something that was common among the others. "Why only the surnames?"

"That's an easy one, Potter," Malfoy said from Harry's right side, finally getting his attention again. "It's a Pureblood thing. We've all grown up doing it, and it's now a Slytherin tradition to mostly use surnames. Though closer ties – or friendships as some may call them, though we normally think of them as alliances – bring with them the stopping of surnames."

"That makes sense except for the fact that the term Pureblood isn't something I've heard of before."

"A Pureblood is someone with only magical blood in their family for at least seven generations, Potter," Nott said, finally speaking. "You are a Half-Blood. Your mother was a Muggle-born, also known as a

Mudblood by Purebloods. Most would take offense at the word, though I hope you will not."

"Mudblood means dirty blood, Potter," Davis said, seeing his look of confusion. "It's the worst of the worst. Nott just wants you to know that you'll hear it around the Common Room a lot, so he's hoping you won't try to duel anyone who uses it. It's an insult to Muggle-borns, which means it's an insult to your mother, but it's a common thing and you'll have to get used to it."

"Just as long as you all don't use it at me or my mother, I'll keep any emotions I may feel to myself," Harry said politely, trying to pick up on their more formal style of speaking. Greengrass nodded to him, letting him know that she understood and that she had also caught his try at formality.

Harry liked that about the Slytherins. To everyone else, they'd only catch the first meaning, never the second meaning, but almost everything a Slytherin did had a second meaning or reason behind it. Harry saw this as the Slytherins began talking among themselves, including him in random conversations. Otherwise, they left him alone and let him listen so that he could try and pick up their way of doing things.

This continued for the rest of dinner until Dumbledore informed them all that the third floor corridor on the right-hand side was out of bounds. The other Slytherins just laughed off the part about a person dying a painful death. Dumbledore then sent them all on their way to bed after having them sing the school song, which all the Slytherins did as fast as they could, Harry included.

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"And this is where the secret entrance to the Slytherin Common Room is," the fifth year Prefect that was leading the first years around said, stopping in front of a bare stone wall at a dead end in the dungeons. "The password is 'Snakes are the Kings' for now." As the Prefect said the password, the bare strip of wall in front of the group slid open, showing the first years an entrance way into a room. "Follow me."

Harry looked around his common room, staring at the round, greenish lamps hanging from the rough stone ceiling on chains, the

high-backed chairs by the fire, and the elaborately carved mantelpiece that was above the crackling fire. He saw a few older Slytherins sitting around the fire in the chairs, talking away, though it looked as if most were either not in the Common Room yet or they were in bed already.

"Down those halls, you'll find the dormitories," the Prefect said, bringing Harry's attention back to him and the halls on the opposite side of the room from the entrance. "Girls are down the left hall and boys are down the right. Boys, you cannot, in any circumstance, get past that first torch in the girls' hallway. Do not even try as everyone in the House will hear, and we'll all make you regret it. Am I understood?" Harry nodded along with the other boys.

"Good. Now, all of you will go into the first dormitories in the halls. Your belongings are already in there, so just unpack and get into bed. You'll most certainly have a long day tomorrow, so you'll need the sleep. Now get out of my sight!"

Harry and the other first years all looked at each other for a moment before each gender split up and went down their own hallways and into their dorms. Harry stared around the room, though he tried his best to keep a blank face as he did so. There were six four-poster beds with green and silver hangings. Beside each bed was a great mahogany wardrobe on one side and a mahogany desk, which included shelves above it for books and supplies, on the other. At the foot of each bed was a trunk, showing which boy had which bed.

Harry quickly found his bed, the one closest to the door, and opened his trunk. Taking out his robes and uniforms, he hung the robes up and folded the uniforms neatly into the drawers inside the wardrobe. He then took his books out and placed them on the shelves of his desk, the bindings facing out. His parchment, quills, and ink followed, though they were put into the drawers of the desk. His school bag was placed on the back of his desk chair, which was also made of mahogany.

Grabbing a pair of pajamas, which did not belong to Dudley as Harry had been smart enough to buy an entire new wardrobe of muggle clothes as well as wizard while he had been away from Hagrid while in Diagon Alley, and his toiletries, Harry went into the shared bathroom and quickly got ready for bed within five minutes.

By the time the other boys were finally done unpacking, Harry was done and getting into his own bed. Nott, Malfoy, and Zabini all nodded Harry a good night, which Harry returned quickly. Harry was correct in guessing that Crabbe and Goyle weren't smart and couldn't think for themselves most of the time.

Drawing his curtains closed around him, Harry settled down into bed and thought about what he would be dealing with around the school the next morning as he slowly fell into the deepest sleep he had ever had in his entire memory.

Please, read the next chapter or two before you say this isn't your type of story. I promise that it's different from most Slytherin Harry stories. Very different. If you just give it a chance, you'll probably find that you like it.

Now, this is the first story in a trilogy, and I'll also have a Post-Hogwarts story added to it. Becoming Alpha is complete, and I'm going to begin work on the second story sometime in the near future. I'll be posting once a week, Sunday evenings. Today is the exception because it's the first chapter.

Also, this is my first real Harry Potter story, so feedback would be greatly appreciated. Please, let me know what you think of this story.

Posted: 10/10/10

Chapter Two

Harry walked into the Great Hall, hungry and in the need of some breakfast. With him were the other first year boys, the girls following them. Harry was actually in the middle of the group of boys, the boys agreeing that protecting one of their own was a very important thing to do.

Once all of the young Slytherins were sitting down at their table and eating, Professor Snape, the Potions Master and their Head of House, came down and started handing each student a schedule. As he handed Harry his schedule, the professor gave Harry a searching look, quite similar to the ones the other professors were giving him. Harry met Professor Snape's look head on, looking him right in the eye and daring him to make a scene at breakfast. Snape moved on quickly after that, handing out the other schedules and moving onto the next group of students.

Looking at his schedule, Harry saw that they had Defense Against the Dark Arts first thing that morning with a break following it. Shrugging, Harry went back to eating, knowing he would have to go and grab his books for the day before he went to class. The other first year Slytherins were discussing their schedule and how much of a pain it was.

"Can you believe it? Two hours of Potions every Friday with the Gryffindors!" Draco complained. "I'd rather have it with Ravenclaws or Hufflepuffs than Gryffindors."

"We have Charms with Hufflepuffs," Daphne said. "Great."

"I'm looking at the idea of Herbology with Ravenclaws to be the worst, personally," Theodore said, looking down at his schedule with distaste.

"What do you think is the worst, Potter?" Draco asked suddenly, turning to look at Harry curiously.

"Why does it matter who we have classes with?" Harry asked as he swallowed his bite of eggs. "We're all students here. I mean, sure, we aren't all in the same House, but we're all just eleven-year-olds who have been separated because of our traits. We're all here to

learn, so why bother worrying about who we have the classes with as long as we learn in the classes?"

Daphne, Tracey, Blaise, and Theodore were all looking at Harry curiously, as if they didn't know what to think of him. Draco, on the other hand, was glaring openly at Harry. Pansy, Millicent, Crabbe, and Goyle were all just looking at Harry without much expression on their faces, though it looked as if Pansy was thinking of Harry as something disgusting.

"Why does it matter who we have classes with? Potter, it makes an entire difference!" Draco said while waving his arms around a bit. "We're the best of the school. Because of this, the other Houses try to make us look bad so that we lose points every period. The only classes that are okay are the ones with Snape as he's our Head of House and any that we have alone. Snape favors us above anyone else, and when we're alone, the teachers can only take points off of us for something we actually did do."

"Then why not tell the rest of the school what you think about it?" Harry asked rationally. "Why not inform them that we're all human over here, not reincarnates of the dark? Tell them that we're just like them but we have more ambition and cunning, making it so that we become more powerful easier because we have the minds to sneak past those who don't have the ability. Just let them know how you feel, how the whole House feels, and they'll listen."

"That's not how Hogwarts works, Potter! Ask anyone in Slytherin and they'll tell you the same."

"What would happen if I talked to someone from Hufflepuff, from Ravenclaw? What if I told them what I'm really like? Do you think they'd listen? I think they would. I think we'd get people off of our backs if we just talk to them and stop trying to make their lives miserable."

Daphne, Theodore, Blaise, and Tracey were all looking at Harry with newfound respect along with a lot of curiosity. They were truly interested in what he had to say, though it looked like Theodore Nott also seemed to be listening to Draco, though not as much as he was to Harry.

"Well, I'm done," Harry said suddenly as he put his fork down, grabbed his schedule, and stood up. "I'm going to go grab my Defense textbook. Anyone else coming with me?" Harry looked around at the other first years and saw Daphne, Blaise, and Tracey putting their forks down and getting up. Theodore was hesitating, as if unsure what to do. Looking between Harry and Draco, he stayed put, but didn't pick up his fork again.

Daphne, Blaise, Tracey, and Harry all walked out of the Great Hall amongst a lot of whispering and pointing, which all four ignored. They went straight to the entrance to the dungeons and headed in the direction of the Common Room. While most first years may have gotten lost in the dungeons, these four all had memorized the route by looking at certain markings along the corners that the Prefect had pointed out to them.

"So, Potter, did you really mean all of that before?" Daphne asked, breaking the silence between them.

"I did," Harry replied, not giving away anything more.

"Potter – Harry," Tracey began, "you grabbed my attention with what you said. Do you really think talking with the other Houses will change some of the rivalries from the past?"

"Well, someone has to try. Besides, if a Slytherin doesn't make the first move, no moves will ever be made. We're the ones they're all afraid of, so we have to be the ones to show that we aren't what everyone says we are. I also meant what I said about us all being eleven-year-olds. Think back to last night. Did any of you think of those other first years as anything else but fellow classmates that were as nervous as you were, classmates as confused as you were? I sure didn't. I thought of them as people just like me, just from different backgrounds."

"When you put it that way... I guess it does make sense," Tracey admitted, sounding a bit guilty.

"Potter," Blaise growled out, still unable to sound friendly, though it sounded like he was trying not to sneer, "you do realize that you've now made an enemy out of Malfoy, right?"

"If I have, then I'm going to have to have a little chat with him is all. Besides, what's the worst he can do?" Harry questioned with a slightly raised eyebrow in Blaise's direction.

"Potter, you don't know who you're messing with. He's the son of Lucius Malfoy, who's on the Board of Governors for Hogwarts. He's one of the richest people in the country. Anything he wants, he gets."

"Zabini, you forget who you're talking to," Daphne said. "Potter's the Boy-Who-Lived. If Malfoy's father even tries something, he'll have the entire Wizarding World on his case for it. Potter here has the best defense he can get through his title and fame, even if it's obvious he doesn't like it."

"True," Blaise conceded. "I guess I have to admit that you do have some protection there, Potter. Besides, I like your view of things. Mudbloods may be a pain, but they're all students just like us. We Purebloods just have more power, wealth, and ability. I think I may have to change my views a little, though I still believe Purebloods will always be better than Mudbloods."

"I'll change your view on that, Blaise," Harry said confidently. "Muggle-borns are just like you and me except they know more about the muggle world while Purebloods know more about the magical world."

That was the end of the conversation as they got to the bare stretch of wall that was the entrance to the Common Room. Tracey said the password and all four of them went inside and to their dorms. Grabbing quills, parchment, ink, textbook, and bag, Harry raced out of the room to wait for the other three to come back. Once all four were assembled, they all left the dungeons and began searching for the defense classroom, using any resource they could to find it.

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After defense class, where Harry had sat with Blaise and Draco with Nott, all of the first years went down to their Common Room, not a single word said the entire time. Once down there, Nott went into the boys' dorm room and everyone else split into the two groups from the morning. Both groups then spent almost their entire break on

opposite sides of the Common Room, only moving to go and grab their History and Charms books for their afternoon classes.

At lunch the group was still separated, which caused a lot of talk among both staff and students, though mostly the Slytherins. Harry, Blaise, Daphne, and Tracey were at the end of the table with six seats between them and Draco, Pansy, Millicent, Crabbe, and Goyle. Theodore Nott was sitting in the middle, though on the side closer to Harry's group, which told all of the first years that while he didn't agree completely with Harry's words yet, he agreed with them more than Draco's.

Unknown to the first years, the teachers were up at their table talking about them and this split in their group. The Slytherin first years were always known for sticking together, so this unusual split was completely out of character and it baffled all of the staff, including Professor Snape.

"What is going on with your students, Severus?" Minerva McGonagall, Head of Gryffindor, asked her colleague. "I've never seen your Slytherins act like that before, especially not in their first year, let alone the first day."

"I'm not sure, Minerva," Severus Snape replied, obviously baffled, which was amazing in itself as Snape rarely ever showed emotion. "I haven't actually seen them since giving out their schedules, and they were all getting along then."

"I noticed that four of your first years left earlier than the rest, this morning, Severus, with one other leaving between two groups," Pomona Sprout, Head of Hufflepuff House, said.

"I caught that as well," said Filius Flitwick, Head of Ravenclaw. "I also noticed that two of your boys, Potter and Malfoy, were arguing about something. Mr. Potter did not seem to be angry, but he most certainly was passionate about what he was saying. Mr. Malfoy was furious at Mr. Potter; you could see it on his face."

"I did not see any of this, but I will most certainly find out from all of my first years what has been going on with them," Severus Snape promised. "I do not like the idea of a feud going on within my own House. This will either be stopped completely, or arrangements shall be made so that no blood will be shed over any argument that may

have occurred." With that, Professor Snape swept out of his chair and down to the Slytherin table.

"I most certainly hope that he stops this before it goes too far," Professor McGonagall said, looking down at the Slytherin first years with worry flashing across her face.

"You know Severus," Albus Dumbledore said, speaking for the first time. "He'll stop it long before it goes too far."

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"What, if I may ask, is going on here?" a voice demanded, making all of the first year Slytherins look up to find themselves on the receiving end of one of Professor Snape's infamous glares.

"I don't know, Professor, what is going on here?" Tracey asked while everyone else was wondering the same question.

"Why are my first years split into two groups with one boy between them?"

"Oh... That..."

"Yes, that. What is going on?"

"It's all Potter's fault!" Draco said before anyone else could say anything.

"And what did Mr. Potter do to cause this?" Professor Snape asked, one eyebrow raised.

"I spoke my own thoughts and opinions," Harry said, unaffected by both the raised eyebrow and the glare.

"And that caused this, how?"

"I'm not really sure, Sir. See, Draco doesn't agree with my views, so he's been keeping away from me. I'm not avoiding him or anything like that; in fact, I wouldn't mind being friends with him. I just can't agree with his opinions on Muggle-borns and the other Houses."

"You're telling me that the reason my Slytherin first years are separated into groups is the fact that two boys can't agree on opinions?"

"Yes, Sir," Harry said, nodding and completely ignoring the sharp tone Professor Snape was using.

"Is this true?" Professor Snape asked, looking at the other first years. The ones near Harry nodded while the ones near Draco all shook their heads; Theodore nodded once, very quickly. "Why is it that you all cannot even get a story straight? Mr. Malfoy, what happened?"

"Potter insulted my family and honor, and those three agreed with him! Nott is unable to decide if he should defend my honor or insult it, so he's staying neutral in the fight and out of the way."

"Mr. Nott, is this true?"

"No, Sir. What Potter said is the truth; Malfoy is lying through his teeth."

"Right, well, then, I guess this is going to be a tough thing to get through. As you all have History of Magic next, I'm going to talk to the Headmaster and see if all ten of us can't get this all sorted out by the time you have Charms later. I'll be back in a moment. You may wish to finish eating while I'm gone."

With that, Professor Snape went back up to the Head Table and right up to the Headmaster, who listened to Snape as he whispered in the older man's ear. The first years began eating again, and shortly after Snape left, he was back with the Headmaster and gesturing for them to follow.

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Once they were all in the Headmaster's office and seated, Dumbledore began to look closely at all of them, making each of them shiver in turn. Harry felt as if the Headmaster was actually reading his thoughts and probing his mind.

"Professor Snape has told me an interesting story," Professor Dumbledore said eventually. "In it, we have two groups with one person in the middle, and each group has a different opinion. Now,

while this normally would not be a worry, it is a very large worry. Rarely before has this happened within a single house, let alone a single year.

"While I understand this is happening because two of you have completely different opinions on things, we cannot allow it to turn into a feud. You all must live together for the next seven years, and having you all against each other will not make those seven years any easier. We must come to some sort of compromise or truce for this to all work out."

"I say you kick out Potter and his friends from the House and send them to Gryffindor as that seems to be where they wish to be," Draco sneered.

"Oh, no, we could never do that. They were Sorted into Slytherin for a reason, so Slytherin is where they shall stay. No, what I meant was, we need some sort of truce so that you all will not allow this difference of opinions to make it so that none of you feel safe while sleeping, or even while inside the castle.

"While you all don't have to like each other, you all must at least be willing to live among one another. You can be separate for meals and classes, but not while sleeping. Professor Snape and I need to know that you'll be able to do this without problem. All of the teachers need to know that you all won't try to sabotage one another because of this."

"That's easy for me, Professor," Harry said. "I don't want this to turn into a war among my classmates. I just don't like the idea that Muggle-borns are treated like scum and that the other Houses seem to hate Slytherins. We're all human beings. Just because we have different traits and are in different Houses doesn't mean that some of us are demons in human form while some are angels."

"Very good. Mr. Malfoy?"

"Fine, I won't do anything to perfect Potter or his stupid friends. They're all blood traitors that have somehow made their way into Slytherin and need to realize that they've chosen wrong. I don't need to hurt them to do that."

"Oh, be quiet, Malfoy," Daphne said. "Yeah, we're almost all Purebloods, but P-Harry here has a point. While they may not have the same kind of blood, wealth, or power in the government as us, Muggle-borns do have magic like us and at least earn a place here in Hogwarts, though never Slytherin. Slytherin is a place for ambitious, cunning Purebloods and Half-bloods to live."

"How can you say that, Greengrass?" Draco demanded. "You've grown up in a dark family, even if it is neutral, and now you're talking like a Mudblood lover!"

"Language, Mr. Malfoy!" Professor Snape snapped.

"Because, Malfoy," Daphne sneered his name, "Harry here made some good points at breakfast. If we stop trying to isolate ourselves from the other Houses, we may just learn that some of the other people in this school are bearable and can be useful in the long run! Besides, they're all human beings like us. I remember last night as well as you must. I saw scared, nervous eleven-year-olds that were just like me, all waiting to be Sorted, all waiting to be told where they'd spend the next seven years of their lives!"

"I did too, Malfoy," Tracey said, looking up at Draco with hard eyes. "We're all the same deep down inside, even if some of our traits are different. Let them separate us for classes and sleeping, but don't let them separate us from the others while we eat or while we study."

The two professors sat in their chairs, staring as the first year Slytherins fought amongst themselves, presenting ideas that no one had presented in the school for years. Neither had had any idea that this was what had caused such a big rift between the two groups in the first years of Slytherin. They had thought it could have been beds or names, but never this. Snape had been humoring Harry when he had told them it was a disagreement of opinions, believing he was lying.

"You're all letting Potter brainwash you!" Draco yelled. "We're Slytherins! We don't need those other stupid Houses to make us the best because we already are the best!"

"Malfoy, think about how the other characteristics from the other Houses could help us all," Blaise said. "Ravenclaws may love to study, but that can help in the long run. You can have them help with

homework, with finding new spells, with doing research for something. Hufflepuffs may not be brave, but they're loyal to a fault and they work hard; those traits together can make the people you want on your side. Gryffindors may be arrogant and cocky, but they're brave and they'd be willing to follow you to the end. If you put them all together with the ambitious and cunning Slytherins... you've got one mean group of people."

"How can you all be thinking like this?" Draco screamed. "We're Slytherins and we don't need the others! We're the best of the best without them. They'd only hold us back."

"And that is where you're wrong, Malfoy," Theodore said, finally choosing a side. "What Zabini just said is the complete truth. No one has ever thought about it until now, thanks to Potter bringing it up, but if you combine the Houses into one group, we'd make one mean group."

"Nott, you traitor! How can you side with these blood traitors?"

"I can side with them because they have the right ideas."

"Potter, this is your entire fault!"

"Is it, Draco?" Harry asked calmly. "I think it may just be yours. You're trying so hard to 'keep tradition' that you can't see something that would work in your favor right in front of you. Either way, I won't do anything to you, and I have a feeling neither will my friends, unless you do something to us. Leave us alone, and we'll leave you alone. Also, you'll be welcomed into the group if you ever realize the mistake you're making."

Draco glared at Harry while Harry turned to face the two shell-shocked professors watching them. The two still couldn't believe that this was happening. It was so uncharacteristic of Slytherins to actually be thinking about bringing the Houses together.

"Well, I say that this is a great start down the road to one of the most successful things that could ever happen here at Hogwarts," a voice said from the side of the room. Everyone turned to see the Sorting Hat on a shelf, looking down at the ten students.

"I knew you'd do well in Slytherin, Mr. Potter. I do believe you're going to be the one to finally stop this stupidity and bring the Houses closer together. You truly have all the traits to fit in any House, but by being in Slytherin, you're on your way to greatness as well as success. Only in Slytherin would you be able to make this connection. You'll do very well where you are. I wish you good luck for your journey ahead."

Everyone was silent for a moment after that before Professor Dumbledore spoke. "Well then, I guess as long as Mr. Malfoy agrees not to do anything as well, you all are done. I'd also like to say that you all have amazed me beyond belief here, and I hope you manage to bring the Houses together, at least in your own year, if not the entire school." Professor Dumbledore gave Draco a look while he said this, as did Professor Snape, making Draco look at his feet for a moment before looking up again and nodding once, curtly.

"Go down to the Common Room. Your break is about to begin anyway, so just go there and get ready for your first Charms class," Professor Snape said. "I'll take you down to the Great Hall. Follow me."

All of the Slytherins followed Professor Snape out, leaving Professor Dumbledore alone in his office. "Well, Fawkes, I believe we're going to have an interesting few years," he said, looking at the red and gold phoenix in the corner of the room on his perch, from which the phoenix had just watched the entire scene.

Well... I hope that this shows you how my story will be a different Slytherin Harry story, but if you want more clarification, the next chapter begins the fun. I'm going to say this now: First Year is the closest to canon but it's also different, so just don't expect all that much to happen until year two, which was where I got to spread my wings and enjoy myself immensely.

I had a reviewer tell me that she thought I'm only posting once a week because I want more reviews, but this isn't the case! The only reason I'm posting slowly like I am is so that I can write the second story. I'd personally prefer slow, consistent updates with barely a break between two stories than a bunch of fast updates and then a long break between stories. Does anyone else agree? Right now I'm over halfway done with the 4th chapter of the second story, which is Harry's 14th birthday. I promise all of you that the DAY I finish the

final chapter of the second story you will get an update, and after that, I'll start posting once or twice a week until this story is entirely finished. I'm working to write the entire second story by the time I finish this one, so please bear with the slowness of updates.

Please, leave a review and let me know what you think of this idea that's been in my head for months. I'll talk to you all again next week!

Posted: 10/17/10

Chapter Three

"I have an idea," Harry said to his four friends as the five of them sat around a table on the other side of the Common Room from Draco and his friends.

"You do?" Theodore asked cautiously.

"Yeah," Harry replied. "When we get to Charms, why don't we sit so that some of the Hufflepuffs have to sit with us?"

"What do you mean, Potter?" Blaise asked.

"I mean, each of us sits at a one of the tables meant for two so that when the Hufflepuffs get there, only some of them can sit with a housemate."

"I like the way you think, Potter," Daphne said, a sly smile coming to her face. "With this we can show them that we're not what they think we are."

"Yeah, we can show them that we can be kind, funny, and not evil," Tracey added.

"My thoughts exactly," Harry said with a smile on his face.

"So we basically talk with them and show them we're not like they think we are?" Theodore confirmed.

"I think what Potter is saying is that we need to leave our arrogance behind during Charms and let our charm take over. Ignore the pun," Blaise said.

"Basically, though I have a feeling your arrogance is actually a mask that's been built over the years from living with your Slytherin families, am I right?" Harry asked.

"I... guess... you're right," Daphne said slowly, truly thinking about it.

"Well then, if we're doing this, we'd better get to Charms early, right?" Tracey asked, grabbing her bag as she did so and putting it over her shoulder.

"She has a good point," Harry said, also grabbing his bag.

The others also grabbed their bags, which already had their Charms books in them, and they all headed out of the Common Room under the watchful gaze of Draco Malfoy, who was doing some serious thinking about what had occurred in the Headmaster's office earlier.

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The moment the bell rang throughout the castle, the five Slytherin first years got to the Charms class. They waited as the fourth year Gryffindor/Ravenclaw class left the room, some of the Gryffindors sneering at the Slytherins until they realized Harry was among the group. Once the room was empty, they all went into the room and decided to sit on the left half of it. Each one of the five took a seat at their own table.

Professor Flitwick looked at the Slytherins curiously, but decided that they must be waiting for their fellow Slytherins. It was a surprise to him when the other Slytherins came in a couple of minutes later and sat on the other side of the room, Draco pairing with Pansy while Crabbe and Goyle paired, leaving Millicent as the one to be alone.

A few minutes after the Slytherins were settled, the Hufflepuffs came into the room and then stopped in surprise. Harry watched as the Hufflepuffs slowly looked between the two different groups of Slytherins on opposite sides of the room. They all began whispering quietly among one another until, finally, a girl with red hair walked out of the group and up to Harry.

"May I sit with you?" the girl asked him. Harry smiled and nodded, happy that at least one of the Hufflepuffs was brave enough to come forward and sit with the Slytherins. "Thanks."

The other Hufflepuffs took that as their cue and four others went up to Harry's friends and asked to sit down. All of them seemed to be surprised to be met with smiles and nods. One of the Hufflepuffs went to Millicent and asked, but that boy was met with a sneer and a shake of the head, confusing all of the Hufflepuffs and Professor Flitwick.

"I'm Susan Bones," the girl next to Harry said suddenly, turning to face him.

"I'm Harry Potter," Harry replied and held out his hand for Susan to shake. Susan seemed slightly taken aback by his politeness, but she reached out her hand and shook his, a small smile forming on her face.

"Please tell your Housemate that I apologize for Millicent's behavior," Harry said, gesturing towards the girl who was glaring at the boy who had been forced to sit next to her due to lack of space. "Only some of us in Slytherin seem to have manners. My only warning is to stay away from Draco Malfoy's group."

"We were all wondering why you were in two groups as well as why the group over here was spread out so much," Susan admitted while she looked around the room and saw that the Slytherins on the left side of the room were making quiet conversation with the Hufflepuffs while the other Slytherins were glaring at everyone in the room but each other.

"Well, there's been a bit of a spat in Slytherin, though only in the first year. Dear Draco over there isn't using his brain enough to realize that the other houses aren't that bad. That leads to why we were spread out over here. We were spread out so that a bunch of you Hufflepuffs could sit with us and make conversation." Harry flashed Susan a smile quickly.

"Really? Why would you want to make conversation with us? I mean, you're Slytherins and we're Hufflepuffs."

"Like I said, that's how Draco thinks. My friends and I, on the other hand, all believe that we're all human here at Hogwarts, even if we all have different backgrounds. House isn't a good enough reason to not make friends among one another." Harry smiled slightly before frowning in Draco's direction. "We're going to try and make Draco see reason, but I have a feeling it won't happen any time soon."

"Well, I guess I have to say that this is quite different from what I expected. I'm glad you're all like this, though. It makes a nice change from what I've been told Slytherin is like from adults and older students."

Harry sat quietly for a few moments before asking a question. "Hey Susan, could you maybe do me a favor?"

"It depends on the favor, Harry," Susan replied, looking skeptical.

"Could you maybe pass on to the other first years, and maybe even the older students, that Harry Potter and his four Slytherin friends are trying to make peace between the Houses? Also that we're willing to talk with anyone who wants to."

"Wow," Susan said, her eyes wide in surprise. "I guess I can, though I'm not sure how much the others will believe me."

"Why don't we come over to your table to say hello during dinner tonight, before we leave?"

"It would make a huge fuss..."

"Oh, don't worry, I'll go alone first and then bring my friends over. I don't think they'd complain too much if the Boy-Who-Lived decided to say hello to a fellow classmate. Besides, Dumbledore and Snape already know what my friends and I are hoping to do."

"Okay, I guess..." Susan replied hesitantly. Harry smiled and her and Susan couldn't help but return the smile, though a bit hesitantly.

Harry was going to say more but that was when Professor Flitwick decided to start class, which he had postponed for a few minutes because he had never thought he'd see the day Slytherins and Hufflepuffs were actually getting along, let alone those in first year.

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"Did you actually say you were going to go and talk with the Hufflepuffs later, Potter?" Daphne asked.

"Yeah," Harry admitted around a bite of steak. "I want all of us to go, but I think it'd be best if I go first as I'm the least likely they'd kill out of all of us."

"At least he's using the Slytherin part of his mind to do this," Theodore said to no one in particular.

"Thank Merlin for that," Blaise muttered under his breath. The others all snickered while Harry gave Blaise an annoyed look.

"When are you going over there, Harry?" Tracey asked.

"Well, I think I'll go now since I'm done eating," Harry said as he put his fork down on his empty plate.

"Have fun," Theodore said. "Oh, and let us know when you need us to come and save you from the terrible Hufflepuffs," he added with a cheeky smile.

"Oh, very funny, Theo," Harry said. "I'll let you all know when I want you to join me at the table with the horrible Hufflepuffs." With that, Harry got up and walked over to where Susan was sitting at the Hufflepuff table.

"Uh, Susan?" Harry said uncertainly while under looks from the students of the school.

"Oh, hi Harry," Susan said as she turned around to find Harry standing behind her. "Here, sit down. I was just telling my friends here about what you said during Charms."

"Thanks," Harry said with a small, nervous smile while he sat down between Susan and another first year girl from Charms.

"This is Hannah Abbott," Susan said, gesturing to the girl next to him, "Justin Finch-Fletchley, Ernie MacMillan, Megan Jones, Zacharias Smith, and Wayne Hopkins," she pointed to each student as she said their names. Harry smiled and nodded to each of them in turn and got a nod, smile, or small wave in return.

"I'd introduce you to my friends, but they're all still finishing up their dinner over there," Harry said while gesturing off-handedly to the Slytherin table. "They'll come over here to say hello when they're done, but don't expect it to be any time soon. All of them are slow eaters. It makes no sense to me, really."

All of the Hufflepuff first years laughed at that statement before Justin spoke up. "So, Harry, are you friends with all of the Slytherins?"

"Not at all, Justin," Harry said just as it clicked in his mind that this was the boy forced to sit next to Millicent during Charms. "In fact, I asked Susan to apologize for the way Bulstrode was behaving in Charms. She's in Malfoy's group, and you really don't want to mess with those five."

"Susan passed on the apology, but I couldn't believe it until I heard it with my own ears," Justin admitted, slightly guilty.

"It's fine," Harry said and he waved off the unspoken apology from Justin. "I understand. You either grew up being taught about the bad side of Slytherin or you were told about it on the train and then here at Hogwarts. It seems to be completely normal for here, though it really makes no sense to me.

"Either way, Slytherin is now split in half within the first years. You have Draco and his four friends, Bulstrode, Parkinson, Crabbe, and Goyle, and then you have my own friends and me. My friends are Daphne Greengrass, Theodore Nott, Tracey Davis, and Blaise Zabini. They actually look at things slightly differently than I do, but they still look at the other Houses and realize that we're all the same, even if we're slightly different. In fact, here they come now."

When everyone turned to look, they could indeed see the four other Slytherins slowly walking towards them, all unsure of themselves. Harry and a couple of Hufflepuffs around him waved the Slytherins over, boosting their courage and making them walk faster in response. By the time they got there, all of the first years in the odd group were smiling slightly as they had all realized in Charms that the ones from the other house weren't so bad.

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Up at the Head Table, the staff was amazed yet again by what was occurring around the Slytherin first years. The only ones not quite as surprised as the others were Albus Dumbledore and Filius Flitwick. Both of them were smiling slightly at the sight of the five Slytherins sitting with the seven Hufflepuffs.

"What is going on with those first years?" Professor McGonagall asked, clearly unable to believe her eyes.

"I truthfully have no idea, Minerva," Professor Snape said, even though he had an inkling of an idea.

"I too wish to know why my Hufflepuffs are talking with those first years as if centuries of rivalry have never existed between Slytherin House and the other Houses," Professor Sprout said without taking her eyes off of the odd group below.

"I think it's great," Professor Flitwick squeaked, forcing every eye away from the students so that they could all stare at him. "None of you were in my last class of the day. It's my first year class with the Slytherins and Hufflepuffs. It was an amazing sight to behold." Professor Flitwick's voice had gotten an awed tone to it as he had finished that sentence.

"What happened, Filius?" Professor Dumbledore asked, his eyes twinkling curiously.

"Those five Slytherins were the first into the room after the bell rang. They all sat on one side of the room, spread out. I thought that they were just waiting for the other Slytherins, so I didn't say anything. When the other Slytherins came in, they sat on the other side of the room in pairs, leaving the seat next to Miss Bulstrode open. Then, the Hufflepuffs came in.

"It was obvious that they were shocked because it was obvious that a few of the Hufflepuffs were going to have to sit with the five Slytherins. Finally, Miss Bones went out and sat with Mr. Potter, which set off the chain reaction of the others all sitting down where there was space. It was silent for a few moments before Miss Bones introduced herself, and she and Mr. Potter began a conversation. After that, the four other Slytherins who had arrived with Harry introduced themselves and conversation was covering half the room in noise.

"The side with Mr. Malfoy and his friends was silent throughout the entire thing. I actually didn't start the class until ten minutes after the bell rang; it was that amazing to see the two houses talking normally. I didn't have a single argument from those Slytherins and Hufflepuffs the entire class. The only ones who were obviously having trouble working together were Mr. Finch-Fletchley and Miss Bulstrode."

The other professors were staring at Professor Flitwick in shock as he finished his tale of the Slytherin/Hufflepuff Charms class that day. Not a single one of them, even Professor Dumbledore, could believe that all of that had really occurred. They all then turned as one to look at the Hufflepuff table, almost as if they had rehearsed the movement.

"I can't believe that actually happened, but... with the way those students are behaving, it seems almost as if it's the only explanation for what seems to be the impossible," Professor Sprout slowly admitted.

"Pomona speaks for me as well when she says that," Professor McGonagall said. "I must say that this is a welcome sight, though, even if it is surprising. As long as no one tries to hurt the first years for it, I don't mind it at all. Does anyone else?" Professor McGonagall gave Professor Snape a look as she said that.

"I, for one, find it very refreshing," Professor Dumbledore said.

"I do as well," said Professor Flitwick, with Professor Sprout agreeing almost immediately after. All heads then turned to Professor Snape as he was the last of the Heads of House to say anything about it and he was the most important.

"I can see nothing wrong with it as long as it doesn't interfere with classes or Quidditch, though that won't be a problem until next year at the earliest," Professor Snape finally said, surprising most of the professors.

"That's right..." Professor McGonagall said mostly to herself, though she was loud enough that the other teachers heard her. "You of all people wouldn't mind this sort of interaction, would you, Severus?" The other two Heads of House looked between the Gryffindor and Slytherin Heads while the Headmaster smiled at them both. "Not after..."

"How could I, Minerva? I'd be a hypocrite if I did," Professor Snape sneered before his face turned back into its emotionless mask. "It would have to be that student to start of this, too." He shook his head slightly and turned away from the Hufflepuff table. "No, I have no problem with this and I don't think I ever will as long as no

violence comes from this." With that, he ended the conversation about the first years.

...

"What do those stupid Slytherins think they're doing over with the Hufflepuffs?" Ronald Weasley asked his fellow Gryffindor first years. "I mean, it can't be anything good!"

"I have to agree with you there, Ron," Dean Thomas said while Seamus Finnigan nodded his own agreement.

"I think we should go tell those stupid Slytherins off so that they'll leave the Hufflepuffs alone," Ron continued after getting an agreement.

"I don't think we should, Ron," Neville Longbottom said. "It looks to me as if the Hufflepuffs were not only expecting the Slytherins, but are also enjoying the conversation they're having with them."

"Nonsense, Neville," Ron said, waving off Neville's ideas. "No one but a Slytherin could enjoy a Slytherin's company, let alone a Slytherin's conversation. The Hufflepuffs are only putting on faces so that the Slytherins won't hex them in oblivion."

"I have to agree with Neville, Ronald," Hermione Granger bravely said. "You mustn't go and bother those at the Hufflepuff table. Besides, the teachers wouldn't allow them to stay there if they thought it would cause trouble. Didn't you see the teachers talking at the Head Table?"

"Oh, shut up, you bloody know-it-all," Ron said before getting up from the table and moving towards the Hufflepuffs, Dean and Seamus behind him while Hermione and Neville watched them in worry.

"Potter! What do you think you're doing at the Hufflepuff table?" Ron yelled as he got closer to the first years, making every head in the Hall turn towards them.

"Talking with my friends, right guys?" Harry replied calmly, the first years around him nodding slightly. "No rule against it, is there?"

"You're at the Hufflepuff table, you bloody Slytherin!" Ron yelled at Harry, making some of the students in the Hall flinch as they could see a fight coming.

"And? I can have Hufflepuff friends," Harry replied, still quite calm, though on the inside he was getting angry.

"You can bloody well not! You're a bloody Slytherin! I don't care how you're bribing or blackmailing the Hufflepuffs, but you will stop! And I mean right now!"

"They are not blackmailing or bribing us!" Susan yelled at Ron, shocking him into silence, though he was still red. "They are kind, unbiased Slytherins with whom we've made friends with!"

"Yeah, Weasley!" Ernie added. "If you want to make friends with us, you've just gotten to a terrible start! Go have fun with your Gryffindor friends. At least the Slytherins listen to our opinions and let us make our own decisions."

"Go back to the lions, Weasley," Hannah said.

With that, every single one of the first years sitting at the Hufflepuff table went back to their original position and went back to their conversation about the Charms homework that had been interrupted. The rest of the Great Hall was staring at the group in shock, gazes flying between the Gryffindors and the Hufflepuff and Slytherin group. None could say a word, and one could hear a needle drop in the room except for by where the first years were talking.

Ron, Dean, and Seamus turned on their heels, went back to their table, grabbed their bags, and left the room, all three fully aware of the stares following them. At the Gryffindor table, Hermione Granger was just shaking her head and muttering about telling them so while Neville was staring at the spots that had just been occupied by the trio. Most of the Hall went back to staring at the off group once the trio had left the room, though many Slytherins, some people from the other Houses, and the teachers all went back to their meals.

"I can't believe it," either Fred or George Weasley, the Weasley twins who were third years, said. "Slytherins and Hufflepuffs friends?"

"I know, my dear brother," said the other twin. "It most certainly is a sight to behold."

"And people think we're going to make this school go crazy!"

"I do believe that those Slytherins will drive much of the school up the wall before we do, my dear brother."

"The shame! Oh, the shame!"

"We're being beaten for the title of driving the school crazy by a bunch of first years!"

Around the twins, many of the Gryffindors were laughing at their antics. Their words had a calming touch for the rest of the Great Hall as most of the students turned away from the odd group to go back to their meals. While none forgot what had happened, they all began to realize that they had no control over what was happening with the little first years. Any sort of fight had been broken before it had started and Hogwarts was going back to normal.

If anyone had thought to think about it, they would have realized that there was no normal in Hogwarts. Things changed with every generation, and it seemed that the famous Harry Potter was going to bring about the big change from his generation in the form of the Houses being united to create one group.

Well, here's Chapter Three. This one was mostly to show you all the beginning of one of MY main plots of the story. I'll still be using a bunch of JK's stuff through 5th year with a lot of my own ideas merged with it, but uniting the Houses is one of the things that is mine without JK's lovely story mixed in, if you know what I mean.

I hope you enjoyed this. The next chapter shows more canon stuff mixed with my own.

Please, review and let me know what you think!

Posted: 10/24/10

Edit 10/25/10: Thanks to Jediprankster on SIYE for an edit to one of the lines I had been trying to find different wording for.

Chapter Four

The next week and a half went by smoothly. Harry and his group of friends, which had expanded to include the Hufflepuffs, had gone and talked to the first year Ravenclaws. While the Slytherins alone may not have been able to convince the Ravenclaws of the fact that they really did mean what they said, the Hufflepuffs helped convince the Ravenclaws, and their group had expanded even more. The whole group agreed that the Gryffindors would be the hardest to convince, so they left the Gryffindors to come to the group themselves.

The Ravenclaws of the group helped the others with their homework. A few of the students had an easier time in each subject, so those students helped the others with the spellwork. Between them all, the whole group was doing very well in their classes and always had free time to spare.

Draco and his friends didn't bother Harry and his friends, so there was no trouble in the Slytherin dorms. The main problem for the group was Ron Weasley and his friends, which included the entire first year of Gryffindor, though it was obvious many of those first years did not like being in the group. The Gryffindors attacked the group whenever they could. They used both words and physical means to try and upset or anger the group into retaliating and getting into trouble. The group just retaliated by telling their Heads of House each time an incident occurred so that they had a record of what was going on.

It was the second Thursday of the year, and the first year Slytherins had their first flying lesson with the Gryffindors. Draco had actually asked Harry if he and his Slytherin friends were willing to put aside their differences for the time just so that they could get through their flying lesson with the Gryffindors looking like a united group, like they had agreed to do during Potions class. Harry had agreed and all ten Slytherins were walking down to the lesson together.

When they got there, they were met with the sight of twenty broomsticks in front of them. The Gryffindors weren't there yet, so the Slytherins just hung out in a group, all talking about how the brooms here at Hogwarts were supposed to be terrible. Draco and Harry had even managed to hold a polite conversation about how they thought the Gryffindors would do. Both agreed that Neville

Longbottom would have some trouble while Ronald Weasley would be okay but not the best even though he was bragging away about his skills. Harry didn't mention it but Draco had been doing the same thing the past few days.

Just then the Gryffindors arrived, stopping just in front of the brooms and glaring at the Slytherins. Well, most of them were glaring. Hermione Granger and Neville Longbottom were looking at them hopelessly before they looked back at the other Gryffindors. Harry even saw Hermione give him a look that made him think she was begging him to help her for some reason that he couldn't guess at.

Then Madam Hooch, the teacher, came over with her yellow eyes that reminded Harry of a hawk flashing at the sight of her students. She pushed some of her short, gray hair out of her eyes before glaring at all of her students slightly. Finally she walked over to the front of the two lines of broomsticks and stood there.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" she barked. "Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up."

The Slytherins quickly took up one line of brooms, Harry and Draco in the middle with their group of friends on their side of the line. One look at his broom told Harry that it was old as it had twigs sticking out at odd angles and the wood was cracked slightly and worn so much that it shined in a way that definitely wasn't polish.

"Stick out your right hand over your broom and say 'Up!'" Madam Hooch called from the front of the class, making everyone pay attention to her.

"UP!" everyone shouted.

Harry's broom jumped into his hand without hesitation, but he noticed as he looked around that his was one of the few that had. Next to him, Draco's had gone up, though from the look on his face, Harry guessed it had hesitated slightly. Theo's broom had flown up to his hand after the second time he called it. The rest of Harry's friends got it on the fourth or fifth try, making them all pleased with themselves. Draco's friends took much longer, finally getting it after about ten tries each.

Looking over at the Gryffindors, Harry saw that Hermione's was rolling over next to her while Neville's had yet to move at all. Ronald's broom finally went up, but instead of going into his hand, it hit him in the face, which made Draco laugh next to Harry. Dean and Seamus both finally got theirs to react after multiple tries, though they didn't succeed before Harry's friends. Finally, Lavender and Parvati, the only other Gryffindor girls, got theirs to come up after Hermione got hers to, which was saying something as Hermione took ages to succeed.

Once Neville and Ronald finally got their brooms to go up, Madam Hooch began showing them how to mount their brooms. Harry understood what she was saying quickly and noticed Draco wasn't following instructions. Wanting to keep his house from getting laughed at by Ronald and his friends, Harry pointed it out to Draco, who looked to be about to retort before he realized that he did in fact have it wrong and fixed it. He muttered about doing it like that for years while he did it, but he was fine when Madam Hooch came down their line, which was all that mattered.

"Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the ground, hard," said Madam Hooch once she was back in the front. "Keep your brooms steady, rise a few feet, and then come straight back down by leaning forward slightly. On my whistle – three – two –"

Everyone watched as Neville kicked off too early in his nervousness and continued to rise even after Madam Hooch told him to come down. Harry could see his eyes looking down at the ground that was slowly falling away; they were full of fear. Harry gasped as Neville lost his grip and slid sideways off the broom, falling down to the ground quickly with a WHAM. He was facedown in the ground and his wrist was bent at an odd angle, which was what the loud crack that Harry had heard must have been. Harry barely noticed that the broom was still in the air and floating both upwards and towards the forest as he watched Neville.

Madam Hooch rushed over to him and muttered something that Harry couldn't hear as she picked him up. She then turned to the rest of the class. "None of you is to move while I take this boy to the hospital wing! You leave those brooms where they are or you'll be out of Hogwarts before you can say 'Quidditch.'" She then led Neville away and towards the castle.

Harry saw Draco about to laugh at Neville and hit him on the arm hard, shaking his head at him forcefully. Draco glared at Harry for a moment before turning away and facing the Gryffindors, who were watching the byplay with interest as this was their first time seeing the split in Slytherin outside of the Great Hall since the Slytherins were in a truce for Potions. Harry caught the gleam of light in the grass just as Draco went over to it and picked up a glass ball that Harry had vaguely seen Neville with during breakfast.

"Look at this," Draco said while holding up the glass ball for the class to see. "It's that stupid thing that Longbottom got from his gran this morning."

"Give it here, Malfoy!" Ronald yelled as he walked forward to stand in front of Draco, pushing Gryffindors out of his way as he did so.

"I think I'll leave it somewhere for Longbottom to find – how about – up a tree? On the roof?" Draco smiled nastily as he said this.

"Give it here, Draco," Harry said quietly. Every head turned to face Harry.

"Standing up for a Gryffindor like Weasley here, Potter?" Draco sneered, gesturing towards Ronald. "I didn't think you'd stoop so low."

"Actually, I'm trying to stop you from looking like even more of an idiot in front of another House but..." Harry trailed off as Draco look around them and realized everyone was looking at them. "Just give it here, Draco." Harry held out his left hand as his right hand was still holding his broom. Draco actually contemplated giving it over, but then Ronald Weasley had to go and ruin it.

"Yeah right, Potter!" he snarled. "Give it here, Malfoy. It's obvious you're all working together on this one. Give it to a real person, not a snake."

Draco turned to Harry for just long enough to their eyes to meet. Harry could tell just by looking into his eyes that Draco wanted revenge on Ronald but wanted Harry's help to do it so that nothing would happen to the Remembrall. Harry, seeing this as a chance to make a lot of new ties, nodded just enough for Draco to see. Draco

then jumped onto his broom and flew up over a tree, throwing and catching the ball when he got steady.

"Come and get it, Weasley!"

Ronald snarled and flew up towards Malfoy without hesitation, steadying himself once he was facing him. Harry, surprising everyone but his friends, who had seen the exchange between him and Draco, got onto his broom and flew up behind Ronald. Harry flew quicker and steadier than either of the Purebloods who already knew how to fly, making it so that Draco had to keep his mask on his face carefully.

"Give it here Malfoy, or I'll knock you off that broom!" Ronald yelled at him, not even noticing Harry had flown up behind him.

"Oh yeah?" Draco sneered, not even having to try as he knew he was a better flier than Ronald, though he was relieved that it wasn't Harry he was up against.

Ronald tried to flatten himself up against his broom to shoot like an arrow at Draco, but Draco moved out of the way and Ronald overshot it by a long shot. By the time he had turned around to face Draco, Harry was way above both boys so that Ronald wouldn't see him in the air.

"Is that the best you can do?" Draco taunted as he waved the glass ball in the air. "Face it, Weasley, you aren't going to get it from me."

Ronald growled as he realized it was a truth and slowly dived towards the ground. He then surprised everyone by suddenly flying up towards Draco, who barely had a chance to throw the glass ball in the opposite direction, which happened to be towards the school.

Harry had been watching Professor Snape, who was on the front steps of the school and watching the three boys silently, when he noticed the glass ball being thrown by Draco. Watching it, he could see its movements in slow motion as it arched up and then began to dive down towards the ground. Harry pushed himself flat against his broom as he angled it towards the ground in the direction he knew the ball would be headed and ignored everything but his broom, the glass ball, and himself. He barely even noticed the wind blowing past his ears as he reached out and grabbed the Remembrall just

two feet above the ground, which gave him just enough time to pull his broom out of the dive so that his feet were skimming the ground before he landed.

The first thing he saw once his senses returned was Ronald and Draco landing and staring at him in awe. The first thing he heard was his friends rushing over towards him. The first thing he smelled was the grass around him. The first thing he felt was the cool glass in his hand and the wood between his legs. The first thing he was afraid of was the sight of Professor Snape sweeping across the grounds towards him.

"POTTER!" he yelled when he was close enough that the other students had seen him. "Come with me!" He walked right up to Harry and his friends, giving him an odd look.

"Uh... Professor?" Harry asked bravely, his Gryffindor side coming into play.

"Yes? What is it, Potter?" Professor Snape snapped. "I thought I told you to follow me."

"I was wondering if I could give this to a Gryffindor to give back to Neville. It is his Remembrall after all." Harry held it up for his professor to see so that he could tell Harry wasn't lying.

"Go ahead, but hurry up. I don't have all day, you know."

Harry quickly got off his broom and ran over to where the Gryffindors were standing. The boys moved out of his way as he rushed over to where Hermione was standing alone, her broom held loosely in her hand as if she didn't want to be holding it at all. Harry held out the glass ball to her and she took it in her hand tightly.

"Can you give this to Neville for me please?" Hermione nodded. "Oh, and please let him know that while I may have caught it, Draco didn't want to go into the air until Ronald there told him off again. I've gotta go!"

With that, Harry hurried off, still holding his broom, and went over to where Professor Snape was waiting. Following his professor, Harry was led back into the castle and up to the fifth floor and a classroom he had never seen before. Professor Snape opened the door and

Harry was able to see Slytherins and Hufflepuffs in the room before Professor Snape filled the doorway.

"Professor Vector, I need Flint for the rest of the period," Professor Snape said in his usual tone.

"Of course. Go on, Mr. Flint."

Out of the room came someone who looked similar to Crabbe and Goyle, who both looked like they had troll blood in them Harry's classmates said. He gave Harry an odd look when he saw him there, but both boys followed Professor Snape down to his office in silence, neither one wishing to anger their Head of House. Both boys sat down where Snape pointed for them to as he slammed the door closed and swept into his seat behind the desk.

"Flint," he started, turning to the boy and ignoring Harry completely, "you know how I feel about your Seeker this year." Flint nodded. "Have him and Potter here fly against each other." Flint looked like he was about to protest, but Professor Snape raised a hand up to stop him. "I know about the first year rule, but I will talk to Professor Dumbledore about it. Besides, even if it doesn't work out, you shall have a better Seeker for next year, which is better than having to find someone to replace Higgs next year."

Flint nodded and stood up, gesturing for Harry to do the same. He began walking around him, muttering to himself for a few moments before looking up at Professor Snape and nodding.

"He'll do," he said. "That is, he'll do if he has the skill."

"As much as I hate to admit it, his father was one of the best players at Hogwarts during his time, though he was a Chaser, not a Seeker," Professor Snape sneered. "He has the skill. He caught a Remembrall after a hundred foot dive during the first flying lesson of the year."

"That your first time on a broom, Potter?" Flint asked him while he looked at Harry in a new light. Harry nodded. "Well then, that changes everything. I'll try him out, but if you can get permission, I have a feeling Potter here won't need a tryout to be on the team. Though... if he's going to be Seeker, he'll need a broom to fit him..."

A Nimbus would be the best broom he could get..." Flint was mostly talking to himself by then.

"I'm sure if you inform Potter on how to purchase one, he can buy himself a broom, though I'll certainly bring it up with the Headmaster and see if we can't get a free one for Potter," Professor Snape told Flint while looking Harry in the eyes. "You also may wish to inform Potter here on what Quidditch is and how to play. He seems to be very lost at the moment as he wasn't raised in the Wizarding World like he should have been."

"Ever heard of Quidditch, Potter?" Flint snapped.

"I've heard of it, but I don't know anything about it," Harry admitted without feeling embarrassed as his friends had all helped him realize that feeling embarrassed just because he had been forced to grow up as a Muggle just wasn't worth it.

"Yes, well, when we get you onto the field this weekend for a tryout, you'll meet me half an hour early and I'll explain what you're going to be doing. If we have permission and you beat Higgs, I'll have someone explain Quidditch to you. Until then, just wait for my owl on when to meet me at the pitch, and don't tell anyone outside of Slytherin of your chance. If I hear anyone that isn't a Slytherin talking about it, you lose your chance to be on the team. Do you understand me?" Harry nodded. "Good. The owl will have directions to the pitch in case you don't know the way."

He turned to face Professor Snape. "I believe my work here is done with Potter. Thank you for bringing him to my attention, Professor. Hopefully Professor Dumbledore will permit him to be on the team and we'll continue to hold onto that Quidditch Cup as well as the House Cup."

"Hopefully," Professor Snape drawled. "Now, I need to talk to Potter alone." Flint nodded and left the room.

"Potter, were you trying to show off?" Professor Snape almost shouted at him.

"No, Professor," Harry replied. "Draco was making a fool of himself in front of the Gryffindors, and I was trying to stop him. It had almost worked when Ronald Weasley ruined it by saying we were working

together to get the Remembrall. Draco told me with his eyes that he wanted revenge and needed my help, but he wasn't going to hurt anyone. I could tell that by my help he meant he needed me to make sure the Remembrall didn't fall and break.

"I stayed out of the way and ready to help if anything happened to either of the boys or the ball. I noticed you on the stairs watching the whole thing just before I saw Draco throw the Remembrall. You saw the rest; I was just trying to stop anything from being hurt or broken."

Professor Snape looked at Harry for a few moments before speaking, "You certainly remind me of your mother. Lily Evans was always trying to keep peace where she could, and sometimes, even where she couldn't. You did a good thing today, Potter, trying to help not only your fellow Slytherin but the Gryffindors too. Your mother would be proud.

"Now, when you see your friends you'll tell them that you got yelled at and you have detention with me every night for all of next week. When you get to the Common Room, you may tell them the truth, but only there. If the other Houses hear that I let you off easily, and even more, I'm trying to get you onto the Quidditch team, the school will go crazy. Have I made myself clear?"

"Yes, Professor."

"Make sure you're in the Common Room by six thirty all of next week. If you must get books from the library, send a friend to do it."

"Yes, Professor."

"Now get out of my sight!"

Harry quickly left the room with many different things on his mind, the most important of which was what Professor Snape had told him about his mother, whom he had heard nothing about before then.

Well, here's the answer to if Harry got onto the team or not still... Basically. For Draco being on the team - Second Year holds the answer.

Next chapter has Potions class, but you don't see the true side of Snape until Third Year, which is pretty far away - Sorry.

Otherwise, I hope you're enjoying my version of all of this. I'm working on Chapter Seven of the second story, which I'll tell you now is at the end of the summer before Fourth Year, so I should be working on Year Four shortly.

A Happy Halloween to everyone. I hope you enjoy the candy! Can you possibly leave me a review for the holiday? :)

Posted: 10/31/10

Chapter Five

"Seeker?" Theo exclaimed in a whisper once Harry was done explaining to his friends what had happened.

"Harry, this hasn't happened in decades," Daphne said while she turned a page in her Charms book, looking over the lesson again from earlier that day.

"I'm not officially on the team yet, you guys," Harry said in exasperation. "Besides, I don't even know what Quidditch is. All I can guess is that it involves flying."

"You don't know what – oh, right, I forgot that you grew up as a Muggle," Theo said.

"Quidditch is only the best sport in the world," Blaise said, lifting his head from his Herbology homework to look at Harry. "It's done on broomsticks in the air."

"You have seven players and four balls," Tracey continued. "The players are called the Keeper, the Seeker, the Beaters, and the Chasers. The balls are the Quaffle, the Bludgers, and the Golden Snitch."

"The Chasers use the Quaffle to try and score points on the other team by getting it through one of the other team's three hoops, which are guarded by the Keeper," Daphne said without looking up from her book.

"The Beaters carry around bats that are used to hit the Bludgers away from their own team and at the other team," Blaise commented as he looked back down at his Herbology book.

"The Seeker tries to catch the Golden Snitch, which is really fast and almost impossible to see," Theo said. "The Seeker is the most important player on the team in a way because while the Quaffle can get a team ten points per score, the Golden Snitch can get a team on hundred and fifty points, making it almost impossible for that team to lose."

"Great, another reason for people to think I'm important," Harry said sarcastically as he took out his Defense Against the Dark Arts book, opening it to the reading they were assigned that day for homework.

"That's only if you make the team, Harry," Tracey said as she too got out her DADA book to read. "You said that one yourself."

"I know I did," Harry sighed, "but Flint said that unless Dumbledore says I can't be on the team, I probably wouldn't even need a tryout just because Snape told him about the flying lesson." Harry finished the page he was reading and turned it.

"Harry, what you did in class was amazing!" Theo exclaimed as he finally got out his Charms book so that he could also join his friends in doing their homework. "I've never seen flying like that before."

"Well good on me because now I'll be the talk of the school yet again," Harry muttered just loud enough for Daphne, who was sitting next to him, to hear.

"Harry, you haven't stopped being the talk of the school yet!" she laughed. "It'll be ages before everyone gets tired of talking about you, especially because of the fact that you're getting the different Houses to get along while being a Slytherin."

"Great," Harry muttered, this time loud enough for the whole group to hear. "So you're telling me that my sense of safety from the rumor mill has been fake this entire time?"

All of his friends looked up from their homework to share a look before facing him and nodding, making him groan just quietly enough that the other Slytherins in the Common Room didn't tell him to shut up. Harry put his face in his hands and shook it just enough for his friends to notice while he muttered, "Great, just great," under his breath over and over. The other four just smirked until Harry calmed down and they all went back to their homework, working silently.

...

Harry silently turned in his two foot essay on the ingredients from the boil cure potion from the week before to Professor Snape and then went back to his seat next to Draco. Looking up at the board, Harry

saw that they were making the opposite potion that day: the boil causing potion. Snape finished collecting the essays and ordered them all to begin working on the potion.

Harry and Draco both looked each other in the eye, caught the silent message that both boys were sharing, nodded, and set to work. While Harry collected the ingredients from the student stores that they didn't have in their kits, Draco got the ones they did have out of his kit. Both boys sat on their stools and began preparing the ingredients needed for the first few steps while their water began to heat up in their cauldron.

During the first lesson, both boys had realized that they could work well together if they split the tasks up properly. They had formed an agreement that Harry would deal with ingredients from the stores while Draco used their kits; they would take turns when it came to the actual potion making. One boy would do the stirring, or whatever it was the potion needed, while the other put the ingredients in; the next class, they would switch jobs.

Professor Snape walked over to their cauldron just as Draco began putting the ingredients in for the first step as it was his turn to do ingredients. Harry already knew that they had to stew for five minutes, so he kept an eye on his watch as he continued to prepare his ingredients. Draco went back to his own ingredients while both boys waited.

While Professor Snape didn't like Harry as much as Draco, he didn't seem to truly dislike him either; it was more like he didn't know what to make of Harry. Professor Snape didn't try to make him look bad nor good; he just left Harry alone to work on his potions with Draco, who he did try to make look good. They had a silent agreement to act like that during class, and neither was willing to break it.

The rest of the class went by smoothly with Hermione stopping Neville from blowing up his cauldron yet again. The Slytherins got along, though they didn't actually talk much. Both Harry's and Draco's friends paired up by gender in their own groups while Harry and Draco worked together. The two boys only spoke about the class and nothing more. Even though the Gryffindors, except for Hermione, didn't actually notice it, the Slytherins were only acting like a group for Potions. Once they were all out of sight of both the

Potions room and the Gryffindors, they would all go back to ignoring each other.

Harry and his four friends sped up to get ahead of Draco and his friends once out of sight of the Gryffindors to grab their homework from earlier on in the week before heading to lunch. Fridays had become the official study day for the first years. After lunch, the Slytherins, Hufflepuffs, and Ravenclaws all went up to the library, though not all at once, and grouped a bunch of tables together to do their homework. Between the students, there were always enough textbooks to go around so that each student only brought one or two books.

The first years had all been there for an hour when someone tapped Harry on the shoulder lightly from behind. He turned to see Hermione and Neville both standing there awkwardly, as if unsure they could be there.

"Um, could we maybe join your study group?" Hermione asked cautiously, as if afraid they would be rejected.

"Of course," Harry replied while he gestured to some of the empty chairs next to the Ravenclaws. "We have plenty of room for anyone who wants to join in from the first year."

"Thanks," she replied with a small smile on her face before she and Neville went to go sit down.

"Finally, the Gryffindors are showing their bravery," Daphne muttered just loud enough for the Slytherins to hear. Theo, Tracey, and Blaise all nodded their agreement.

"I have a feeling Ronald and the other Gryffindors were telling those two that Slytherins are evil spawn, and that we're controlling the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws by threatening them with different sorts of torture," Harry said, though it was only meant for the Slytherins to hear so he was quiet. "They were probably told that hanging out with anyone in this group or Malfoy's group would make them evil too."

"I can believe that," Tracey whispered as she watched the two Gryffindors talk with the Ravenclaws about something in an essay. "My only question is why have they changed?"

"Yesterday," Theo said with such force that it was obvious he was sure. "Harry showed them, though Longbottom probably heard it from Granger, that not all Slytherins are evil, and it changed their minds on things."

"I can agree with that," Harry said, "but can you please stop using surnames, Theo? You know how annoying and weird that is to hear that."

"Sorry, Harry," Theo sighed. "It's a hard habit to break after all these years."

"I know it is, but it just doesn't make sense," Harry said as he went back to the essay Professor Snape had just assigned that morning since it was the last essay he had to write for the week.

"I'll try," Theo replied after a moment, effectively ending the conversation as the Slytherins went back to their homework.

The first years spent the next couple of hours working on their homework and getting a good part of it done. They only stopped because it was time for dinner. The whole group packed up their work and they went down to dinner together. It seemed that the entire group had forgotten the problems this could cause because just moments after they entered the Great Hall, Ronald Weasley and his two friends were in front of the group.

"Neville, Hermione, how could you two do this?" he yelled at the two lone Gryffindors in the group. "You're siding with the enemy!" He pointed at Harry specifically as if he was the enemy.

"So Harry is the enemy?" Susan Bones asked Ronald angrily, stepping up to be in front of Harry at the front of the group.

"Of course he is!" Ron yelled as if that was the most obvious thing in the world. "He should have been in Gryffindor! The fact that he's in Slytherin means he's going to be the next Dark Lord or something."

"Just because he wasn't sorted into Gryffindor doesn't mean he's evil," Terry Boot, from Ravenclaw, said in a strong but quiet voice as he stepped forward to be next to Susan.

"He helped a Gryffindor, Ron; he helped me," Neville said quietly while he stepped forward to stand on Terry's other side.

"You're acting more evil than Harry is," Tracey said as she stepped forward to be next to Susan. "He's trying to make friends within the different houses and you're trying to not only stop him, but to also stop your house from making friends outside of it."

"Gah!" Ronald yelled. "Hermione, you were there at the flying lesson yesterday. You saw how Potter was helping Malfoy just as well as I did."

"I saw Harry almost stop Draco before you made him angry again, so Harry flew up to make sure neither of you got hurt!" Hermione yelled at Ronald from beside Harry with a very red face in her anger. "He even got Neville his Remembrall back instead of letting it fall to the ground and break! You were the reason that all happened, not him!"

Harry wasn't trying to make a single move. He had figured out early on that if he let his friends all take care of the idiots, it would just prove his point that much more that the houses could work together and make friends. Harry also wasn't blind, even though he had to wear glasses, and could see the Headmaster coming down to the group along with all four Heads of House.

"What, if I may ask, is the problem here?" Professor Dumbledore asked from behind Ronald in a clear voice. The other teachers were in a line behind him.

"Uh... well – we were." Ronald tried to think of an excuse as he turned around to find himself on the receiving end of many glares and got very nervous.

"Hannah, what's the problem here?" Professor Sprout asked, looking at her Hufflepuff.

"We had all just come into the Great Hall to get dinner after our study session in the library when Ronald here came up and began yelling at Hermione and Neville because they were with us. He said that Harry was the enemy and that they shouldn't be siding with the enemy. Susan, Terry, Neville, and Tracey were all defending Harry before Ronald began trying to blame whatever happened during the

Slytherin-Gryffindor flying lesson yesterday on Harry, trying to use Hermione to back him up." Hannah looked confused as she said the part about the flying lesson as she hadn't been there.

"Hermione defended Harry about the flying lesson saying he had been trying to stop whatever happened. The entire time this happened, Harry didn't make a single move to speak; he just stood there listening. You came up before anything else could be said," Hannah finished before taking a deep breath.

"Is this true?" Professor McGonagall asked the entire group. Harry and his friends all nodded, but Ron and his friends shook their heads. "Oh, what happened then, Mr. Thomas?"

"Ron, Seamus, and I came over here to rescue Neville and Hermione because they were being held in the middle of the group when they all walked in here. Potter was telling both of them something, most likely threats, and it looked like he had his wand in his hand," Dean Thomas said.

"Twenty points from Gryffindor, Mr. Thomas, for your obvious lies," Professor McGonagall said, her eyes narrowing at the trio. "I do not like it when my Gryffindors are lying to me. Ms. Abbott's explanation fits what we all saw from the Head Table while yours does not. Mr. Weasley, you will be having detention with Professor Snape Monday night as it is his student you are attacking with your words." Next to her, Professor Snape was glowering at the Gryffindor, promising him a bad detention for this.

"Now that we've taken care of that, all of you should go enjoy your dinner," Professor Dumbledore said before heading back up to his dinner, the other teachers following.

The first years all began to realize that all of the older students were staring at them after the scene they had made. The three Gryffindors all looked embarrassed, as did a few of the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs, but most of the group just looked around the room to see the reactions of the others. There seemed to be many mixed reactions.

Everyone in the group could tell that most of the Hufflepuffs were proud of all the first years in the group for protecting one of their own, even if the student was a Slytherin. The Slytherins and Ravenclaws

could see past the shocked faces of the Ravenclaws and could tell that most of them were impressed by what had just occurred. The Gryffindors were actually split; some were just angry at Ronald and his friends for losing House points over something so stupid while some were looking at the group curiously with the rest either obviously thinking about the group or glaring needles at Hermione and Neville.

Out of the whole group, only the Slytherins could tell what was going on in their own House. While surprised in the beginning by the split in their first years, the Slytherins had all realized that both groups had come to a form of truce so that no bloodshed would happen, nor would arguments occur often. Many of the Slytherins didn't really mind the fact that Slytherins were getting along with their classmates from the different Houses because they themselves had friends from different Houses, though none from Gryffindor and not as many as the first years had gathered. The rest of the Slytherins just didn't comment on it, though it was obvious that while they didn't mind it, they had some feelings towards specific people in the group.

Right now the Slytherins were still split in opinions, though it was becoming obvious that more were beginning to accept what was going on and not mind it anymore. Most of the table was looking on in hidden awe at how well their own Harry Potter had gathered his friends and made a group so close that they'd protect their own, yet open enough that they'd accept new people into it without much hesitation. A few Slytherins were pleased because of the points lost by the Gryffindors for a stupid reason. The rest of the Slytherins were looking on indifferently, which said that they didn't really care what was going on.

Turning their attention back to the three Gryffindors, the group saw that they were all getting really nervous about the attention. The Slytherins all had to hold back laughs. It was obvious that if you plan to make a scene in the Great Hall, you were going to get attention from the other students.

"Maybe next time you three will think about the attention you'll get before you make a scene in the Great Hall where all of the students eat meals," Daphne said while quite obviously holding in a laugh. "It's really obvious you all don't like attention, yet you bring it upon yourselves. Does that make any sense to you all?" Daphne asked

the group at large, and she received shakes of the head in return. "I didn't think so."

"Shut up, Snake," Ronald said angrily while he blushed red in embarrassment.

"Don't call her snake, Weasley!" Theo yelled just before Harry put a hand on his shoulder to calm him down.

"Why not?" Ronald asked. "I mean, that's what she is, isn't it? She's a sneaky, slimy, Slytherin snake."

"STOP!" Harry yelled just as his friends all began to react to Ronald's remark. "Let's leave him alone. It's obvious he needs to talk down to Slytherins just to feel good about himself. Hopefully he'll get over his arrogance, pride, and hurt soon enough so that we'll be left alone, though I'm not sure that'll happen. Either way, he's just trying to bait us so that we lose points and get detention just like him. Ignore him and go eat."

With that, Harry left the group to head towards the Slytherin table. Everyone else stood there for a moment before Harry's friends all went to their tables to eat, leaving Ronald, Dean, and Seamus just standing in front of the doorway to the Great Hall. The rest of the students were shocked that Harry had stopped his friends from reacting, but none were more shocked in the Hall than the teachers.

The teachers were shocked into silence by what had occurred just as they got to their seats. They had been afraid they would have to go break up the fight again, but Harry had not only stopped his friends from retaliating, but also stopped the chance of another fight from them. A few teachers all came to the same conclusion Dumbledore had the first day: Hogwarts was going to have an interesting few years with Harry Potter among their numbers.

Little bit of a description of Potions Class in there. Mainly I wanted this chapter to show how much the group is uniting at the end there. Hopefully it did that :)

Chapter 8 is written, and I'm hoping my mind will be in the mood to write HP today, but don't hold me to it... My mind has gone a bit crazy after reading The Lost Hero by Rick Riordan. Besides, I should be able to write the next chapter easily enough once I write

the Sorting Hat's song... One of the hardest parts of actually writing the songs is coming up with them and making them different.
Sighs

Anyway, enough about that. Let me know what you thought of this chapter. =D I'm off to see if my mind will write HP or if it's still stuck in PJO...

Posted: 11/7/10

Chapter Six

Harry walked into the Quidditch pitch and stopped short, his friends just barely stopping in time to not run into him. He stared at the six fifty-foot tall hoops, three on each side of the field. Walking into the pitch a bit more, he turned in a circle to look at all the stands surrounding the field. They were all split into four sections, each one a different house color to show where each house sat during a match. There was a special box in the center of one side of the pitch between the Gryffindor and Slytherin stands, which was obviously for the teachers as it was black with the school symbol on it.

"So, what do you think, Harry?" Daphne asked from behind him, bringing him out of his amazed stupor.

"This is amazing!" he replied in awe, making his friends laugh at the look of amazement on his face.

"I remember my father telling me I looked like that when I first saw a Quidditch pitch," Theo said while smiling at the amazed look on Harry's face. It was the first time since they had met him that he had looked like that and it made him seem a bit more normal.

"I remember Astoria looked like that the first time she saw one when she was five," Daphne muttered quietly to herself as she thought about her sister and how she hadn't written to her since she got to Hogwarts.

"Ah, good, you're here Potter," a voice said from behind them, startling Harry into spinning around quickly to spot Flint coming up behind them. "I see you've kept the arrangement within Slytherin alone; very good, Potter." Flint nodded appreciatively, his face blank as he looked Harry over carefully. "Can't have our team given away before it's even formed, eh?" Flint smiled slightly.

"Harry told us that you needed Professor Dumbledore's permission for him to be on the team," Theo said into the silence that had quickly fallen over the group.

"Oh yes, he does," Flint replied as he turned to look Theo over. "I guess we're very lucky, then, as just this morning, Professor Snape came over to me to inform me that Professor Dumbledore has agreed to the use of a first year on our team, though only if it's

Potter here." Flint nodded in Harry's direction. "He also said that if Potter, and only Potter, is the Seeker, he'll get him a Nimbus 2000," Flint continued, trying to keep the awe out of his voice while Harry's friends all whistled appreciatively.

"That means, Potter," Flint started suddenly, whirling around to face Harry, "that you have to get that position. A Nimbus on our team will make us unbeatable!"

Harry nodded quickly when he realized that everyone else really wanted that broom on the team, though he didn't understand why. To him, a broomstick was just a broomstick, though it was obvious to him that it wasn't actually like that in the Wizarding World. It seemed that there were some brooms that were better than others, and the Nimbus 2000 was one of those brooms.

"Now, Potter, I think I can guess correctly that your friends have told you about Quidditch," Flint said. "Well, what I'm going to tell you is that it isn't as easy as it sounds, and I'm hoping it didn't sound easy. As a Seeker, you'll be dodging a lot of Bludgers, especially when we're up against Gryffindor because the Weasley twins love aiming for our Seeker just as much as our Chasers. It doesn't really help that you're who you are," Flint added as an afterthought.

Harry fought back a groan at the idea that his fame would make it so that he was a larger target than normal. He truly did hate his fame, and it didn't help that the rest of the school outside of his House and friends stared at him a lot of the time. Some days he wished that he could just disappear.

"So, Potter," Flint began, drawing Harry out of his thoughts, "when Higgs gets here, you're going to use my broom and then both try and find the Snitch. We both have Cleansweep Sevens, so you'll be equal when you race for the Snitch. The best Seeker and flier will win and get the position with the other as a reserve. Got that, Potter?" Harry nodded.

"Good, then take my broom and show me that you can really fly. Professor Snape may say you can, but I have to see it for myself."

Harry took the proffered broom, mounted, and flew into the air. The wind blew Harry's hair all around and he felt himself relaxing as a smile came to his face. To him, flying was a second nature and

something that really seemed to relax him like nothing else could. He just began flying in any way he could, diving and spinning for fun.

By the time he landed again, Flint was smiling in a way that told Harry that Flint loved his flying and couldn't wait for him to be on the team. Smiling slightly, Harry just could tell that everyone now thought he'd be on the team without a problem. His friends were all staring at him in awe, Theo looking slightly jealous at his flying skills but also happy for Harry. Harry himself just wanted to get back into the air, but he knew he had to wait.

"And here comes the rest of the team now," Flint said, looking behind Harry. Harry turned around to see six other boys coming up to the group. All six had brooms over their shoulders and two had beater bats in their other hands. The two chasers had a crate between them that obviously held the balls.

"Boys," Flint said as the team reached the group, "Potter here has been recommended by Snape himself for the team, so we're going to have a little match between Seekers. Higgs, he's on my broom, so you'll be on equal standing there. The first of you two to catch the Snitch will be our Seeker, the other our reserve. Any questions?"

"Yeah," one of the beaters said, "why Potter?"

"Snape saw our flying lesson," Blaise informed him calmly.

"And how does that answer my question?" the beater sneered.

"It answered your question because Snape saw Harry's flying skills firsthand while it was Harry's first time on a broom," Daphne snapped.

"Bole, calm down!" Flint snapped while he glared at the boy in question. "Wait until you see Potter fly before you question the decision." Bole grunted with his arms crossed over his chest. "Potter, Higgs, in the air. I'll release the Snitch once you're both ready." Flint went over to the crate, opened it, and pulled out a golden ball no larger than a large walnut.

Looking up as he mounted his broom, Harry saw that Higgs had mounted his broom at almost the same moment. Harry, determined to prove himself to everyone there, kicked off from the ground

moments before the older boy, flying higher up than Higgs. Harry just watched as Flint checked to see if both boys were ready before releasing the golden ball into the air. His eyes followed the Snitch as it flew up to his eyelevel before zooming away so fast that Harry couldn't see it anymore.

The next thirty minutes were spent with Harry circling high above Higgs, his eyes searching everywhere for the Snitch. Higgs had tried to fake him out a few times, but Harry had looked and seen no Snitch where Higgs was going, so he ignored the boy and continued his search. Once or twice, Harry had gotten bored and done some steep dives, barely pulling up in time not to crash. Harry had to stifle his snickers when Higgs fell for both fakes even though Harry wasn't even trying to fake him out.

Just as Harry was getting bored enough to go into another dive, he saw the Snitch on the other side of the field by the teachers' stands. Higgs wasn't anywhere near it, but Harry didn't want to give the Snitch away, so he continued to do his dive, though he was actually faking this time. Higgs, thinking Harry was just faking again, just moved closer to Harry just in case the first year had actually seen the Snitch.

Harry, exhilarated by his dive, suddenly pulled up and went up at an angle towards the teachers' stands, going fast because of the momentum he'd picked up from the dive. Before Higgs could even turn around to look to see where Harry was headed, Harry had his hand around the Snitch and was headed to the ground.

Everyone on the ground was confused as to why Harry was landing. That is, they were until Harry held up the Snitch as he dismounted and headed towards Flint, a huge smile on his face and his eyes shining from happiness and exhilaration. The entire team, Higgs and Flint included, were shocked so much that they couldn't move a muscle. Harry's friends were shocked, but they were able to run over to meet him and pat him on the back for a job well done.

"Well, it looks like Potter is out Seeker," Flint said when he finally was able to move again. "Well done, Potter." The rest of the team, Higgs included, nodded their agreement with that statement, eyes wide in amazement still. "We practice every Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday; we sometimes have a Saturday practice as well. Sundays

are from noon until four while Tuesdays and Thursdays are from five until seven.

"Unlike Gryffindor, we don't step up the practices right before the match, but work hard in every practice and remain calm the entire time. Practice tomorrow, Potter, so be here and we'll see about getting you a uniform and a broom."

Harry, eyes still shining in happiness, nodded and gave Flint his broom and the Snitch back before turning to face his friends, who were shocked to see Harry's face. They had never seen Harry glowing like he was then; he had a huge smile and his eyes were gleaming emeralds.

"The rest of you lot, it's time to practice!" Flint yelled as he turned back to the team. "Higgs, you'll practice with us today, and then join the reserve team, which practices on Sunday with the normal team, and then Wednesday alone with me. Got it?" Higgs nodded, only a bit upset over losing his position because even he could tell that Harry was a way better Seeker than he was and would win more games for Slytherin.

"Nice game, Potter," Higgs said, walking over to Harry and holding out his hand for Harry to shake while the others watched from around them.

"Thanks, you too, Higgs," Harry replied, accepting the hand and shaking it. "That was a fun way to see what catching the Snitch would be like."

Higgs nodded and then mounted his broom and took off. The rest of the team followed him while Harry and his friends went back into the castle and headed down to the Common Room so that they could all talk about Harry's face-off with Higgs.

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The next day, Harry got his uniform and began his training in Quidditch on Higgs' broom, which he was letting him borrow for practice until he got his own. In fact, Harry got his own broom a week later; the entire House was in awe over the fact that their team had a Nimbus 2000. Only Slytherin knew that Harry was on the team,

and the fact was going to stay in the House as it was a House secret and every Slytherin knew it.

Once Harry began practicing three times a week, his time at Hogwarts began to fly by. Before he knew it, the summer weather turned into fall weather, and September turned into October. Halloween was upon the first years before they even realized it.

On his way to the Halloween Feast, Harry was told by Terry Boot, from Ravenclaw, that Ron Weasley had made Hermione cry after Charms just because she was trying to help him with the levitation spell. Careful questioning told Harry that Padma Patil had chased after Hermione and calmed her down enough that the girl stopped crying and got happy enough to go to the rest of her classes for the day.

Relieved, Harry entered the amazingly decorated Hall and went over to the Slytherin table, sitting between Blaise and Daphne. The five Slytherins enjoyed the feast up until the point where Professor Quirrell came running into the Hall, yelling about a troll in the dungeons. Almost the entire Hall screamed, though Harry and his friends weren't among them. Once Dumbledore had calmed the students down and told them to go to their dorms, Harry watched the teachers leave the Great Hall and noticed one little detail: While the other teachers had gone to the dungeons, Snape had gone upstairs.

Confused, Harry stopped at the edge of the Great Hall. He turned around just in time to see Professor Quirrell, who had passed out after telling the school about the troll, stand up and check to make sure he was alone. Harry slipped into the shadows like he had the first day before the Sorting, and watched his professor go upstairs. Thinking fast, Harry followed him almost silently and in the shadows.

Much to Harry's surprise, Quirrell took a few shortcuts and ended up in the forbidden corridor of the third floor. Still sticking to the shadows, Harry followed and watched as Quirrell managed to open the door. Listening closely, he heard growling that quickly turned to barking as a three-headed dog came into view. His eyes widening in surprise, Harry barely noticed when Professor Snape turned up, stood in front of Quirrell, got bitten in the leg by the dog, and managed to close the door on the dog before it could bite him again.

Harry snuck back downstairs and into the dungeons without meeting a single soul the entire time, not that he noticed. His mind was racing as he tried to sort out his thoughts about what he had just witnessed. Snape had been headed to the third floor, but so had Quirrell. Quirrell got there first and opened the door to reveal a three-headed dog just before Snape got in the way and got bitten in the process.

Mind still in thought, Harry got to the Common Room by pure instinct and was barraged by questions when he got in there. Shaking his head to try and clear it enough to answer his friends, Harry quickly explained to his friends what had happened. The only thing they got out of it was that Quirrell was up to something, that it had to do with that dog and the forbidden corridor, and that Snape didn't trust Quirrell either. The five friends went to bed thinking about the mystery, but they were all resolved to let the clues come to them or not.

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Two days later, Harry was in the Great Hall, trying to eat breakfast and not succeeding very well. Flint had told Harry that he shouldn't get nervous for his first Quidditch match, even if it was against Gryffindor, but Harry couldn't help it. He had never been in sports at primary school as Dudley had scared all of the students away from Harry. This was Harry's first time doing something like this.

"Harry, calm down, you'll do fine," Tracey assured him softly from beside him where she could feel his tenseness.

"I know I'm ready, Trace, but I've never done something like this; I'm worried," Harry admitted quietly to her and only her.

"Harry, you've been practicing for three days a week for a month and a half, you're the most natural person I've ever seen on a broom, and you're ready for this. Just think about whatever the feeling is you get while you're flying; it should help you calm down."

Harry imagined the rush he always felt while flying; the feeling that he belonged in the air just as much as on the ground. Harry was a bit shocked to feel himself relaxing as he let those feelings flood over him. Tracey smiled when she felt his body relax next to her; she knew he'd be just fine.

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Harry walked out onto the field behind Bletchley, the Slytherin Keeper, and smiled slightly as the amazed whispers going around the pitch as the other Houses realized who the Slytherin Seeker was. He then put his blank mask back on as he listened to Madam Hooch, who was refereeing the match.

"Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you." Harry had to hold back a snicker when he realized she was looking at Flint more than anyone else. "Mount your brooms, please." Harry mounted his broom and kicked off the ground once Madam Hooch had blown her silver whistle, flying faster and higher than anyone else.

Almost completely tuning out the commentary except for things like who scored, a player getting knocked out, fouls, and any word on the Snitch, Harry looked around the field, trying to find the little gold ball before Gryffindor's mediocre Seeker Patricia Stimpson. It was actually a good thing Harry was listening for the word Snitch in the commentary as Adrian Pucey, one of Slytherin's Chasers, dodged one of the Gryffindor Chasers, Katie Bell, Lee Jordan, the commenter, saw the Snitch by Adrian's ear.

Harry zoomed towards Adrian the moment he saw the Snitch. He knew he was ahead of Patricia as she had been further away from the Snitch and he was faster, so he chased the Snitch as it dived under Adrian. None of the Chasers were moving as they all watched the two Seekers racing for the Snitch, Harry obviously in front. Harry put on a burst of speed just as he was closing in on the Snitch and Harry felt the silver wings brush against his gloved hand just as it closed around the golden ball.

Harry pulled out of his high-speed, steep dive before raising his right hand above him, the Snitch clasped in it and quite visible. Everything was frozen for a moment before Slytherin began yelling at the top of its lungs. The entire team was zooming towards Harry, all of them wanting to be in a group to show off.

Just before the team got to him, Harry's Nimbus did something very odd: It bucked. Most would have put it out of their mind except for the fact that it happened again, harder that time. Everyone, teachers

and students alike, could tell that something was very wrong with Harry's broomstick.

Harry was almost bucked off his broom completely, only holding on by grabbing the broom with his right hand as well as his left, the Snitch still caught in his hand. When another buck made his body lift off the broom, Harry twisted his legs together underneath him in an attempt to stay on his broom.

His broom completely out of his control, Harry watched as Madam Hooch and the team players, Gryffindors and Slytherins alike, all began to converge under him, ready to catch him if he fell from his broom. Holding on for dear life, Harry was shocked to see Professors Snape and Quirrell looking at him without blinking when the broom turned him in the direction of the teachers' stands.

While most would suspect Professor Snape of cursing Harry's broom, only five students in the school had all the information about Snape, and Harry was among them. He quickly put the information from two nights ago, Halloween, together with the scene in front of him and realized that even though Snape looked as if he was cursing Harry's broom, he was actually trying to counter the curse that Quirrell was putting on it.

"STOP CURSING MY BROOM, PROFESSOR QUIRRELL!" Harry yelled at the top of his lungs just before his broom bucked again.

Harry's scream shocked the entire stadium. The other professors in the stands, besides Snape, all turned to see that Quirrell was indeed staring at Harry in the way that claimed cursing. Harry's Nimbus gave one last buck, the largest of them all, and then was completely stable as the professors blocked Quirrell's view of him. Only a handful of professors saw Snape also looking at Harry, but they were the important ones of the group.

Shaking from the shock of almost being thrown from his broom, Harry quickly dived down to the ground and dismounted from his broom, Snitch still in his right hand. The other players and Madam Hooch landed as well, all of the Slytherins and Gryffindors surrounding him to make sure he was all right, which surprised him as he hadn't expected the Gryffindors to act like that with a Slytherin, even if it was him.

Once everyone was sure that he was fine, just a little shaken, the Slytherins congratulated him on an excellent catch before the Gryffindors told him that it really had been a great catch. Harry was very confused about the fact that he was being complimented by Gryffindors and decided to bring it up with the others when he had the whole group together.

For now, Harry just wanted to enjoy the victory.

...

To say Albus Dumbledore was upset by what had occurred at the Quidditch match was an understatement. He had been in his office, dealing with Ministry work, when Professors Snape, Quirrell, McGonagall, Sprout, and Flitwick entered his office without knocking. Professor Quirrell was tied up and held by Professor Spout while Professor Snape was held at Professor McGonagall's wand point.

"May I ask what's happened to cause this sort of harsh treatment of your colleagues?" Professor Dumbledore asked kindly, his eyes twinkling, though not as brightly as normal.

"Mr. Potter's broom began to try to buck him off just after he caught the Snitch," Professor McGonagall began.

"When his broom turned to face our box, he looked at us teachers for a moment before yelling at Quirrell here to stop cursing his broom," Professor Sprout continued, acid in her voice as she said it.

"We all turned and saw he was looking at Harry straight on without blinking, not even when Harry yelled that," Professor Flitwick squeaked.

"The problem is that all three of us saw Severus here staring at Mr. Potter as well, though no one else did," Professor McGonagall growled while moving her wand slightly closer to said professor.

Professor Dumbledore took in the sight before him. Professor Snape was glaring at Professor McGonagall, though he looked a bit hopeless whenever he looked at the Headmaster. Professor Dumbledore correctly interpreted that look and decided what he wished to do.

"Could you all please leave Severus alone with me for a little?" Professor Dumbledore asked kindly. "Just wait outside of my office until I send him out to bring you back in." Though the Headmaster said this kindly, all of the professors knew that it was an order, not a request, so they all left without a fight, though Professor McGonagall was a bit hesitant for a moment.

"Now, Severus, please explain what happened."

"I heard Quirrell muttering behind me and turned just enough to see him staring at Potter, so I realized that he was trying to curse him. I started the counter-curse to all curses on an object or person, and it helped Potter keep himself on his broomstick, though I couldn't throw the curse off completely. The most I could do was turn Potter to face the box so that I could see his reactions to what was happening.

"He surprised me when he looked at me, then at Quirrell, thought for a moment, and then yelled at Quirrell to stop cursing him. I'm not sure how he knew that it was him and not me, but he did and I'm grateful because his yelling at me would have turned more people against me than the number against Quirrell."

"Hm..." Professor Dumbledore muttered under his breath. "It seems young Harry is full of surprises," he said aloud so that Professor Snape could hear him. "Please go and collect Quirinus, Severus. Then wait outside with the others."

In his mind, Professor Dumbledore began to realize that there was something afoot going on with Quirrell, but he didn't know what it was. His Defense professor had been acting oddly since his trip, and Dumbledore wasn't sure if he liked it. Unfortunately, because he didn't know what was going on and he was always a curious man who wanted to know all he could, he realized he would have to keep a close eye on Quirrell, but he couldn't let him go – especially if he might be after the Stone. That would mean that Lord Voldemort could be involved, and if he let Quirrell go, who knew what Voldemort would do to get the Stone.

No, it would be best to let this incident go and keep a close eye on Quirrell while also putting up extra defenses so that no other students would be in danger of being hurt by him. Otherwise, he might never know what was really going on.

Professor Snape then swept out of the room, realizing what Professor Dumbledore was going to do. Moments later, a bound Professor Quirrell was thrown into the office, where he fell on the floor and had to be levitated into a standing position by Professor Dumbledore.

"Could you please tell me what happened at the match today, Quirinus?" Dumbledore asked as calmly as he could.

"I-I w-was w-w-watc-chin-ng the m-m-mat-tch wh-when I h-heard Sever-rus mu-mutt-ter-ring und-der h-his b-breath and w-watch-ching y-young M-Mr. P-Potter ca-careful-ly. I d-did t-the c-count-ter-curse to t-try and s-stop h-him. T-then M-Mr. P-potter c-claimed i-it w-was m-me c-curs-sing h-him."

"Thank you, Quirinus. Severus told me the opposite, so I'm not sure which story to believe," Professor Dumbledore admitted, though he was actually lying as he knew Severus was telling the real story. "I'm going to bring the others back in."

With that, Professor Dumbledore went and opened his office door for the others, stepping aside to let them come into his office again. He went and found a seat, waving his wand so that all of the Professors had a place to sit. Another wave of his wand freed Professor Quirrell, much to everyone's shock, and the shaking professor sat down.

"I've heard two similar stories this afternoon," Professor Dumbledore began, "but only one can be correct as they each tell the opposite story. As I don't know which story is correct, I'm going to give you both the benefit of the doubt and let you both go. I do not want to hear of a student being endangered again." Professor Dumbledore's eyes were hard and the twinkle gone from them.

"Severus, Quirinus, please leave and go back to your quarters," he continued, giving Professor Snape a hard look to get him to go. Both nodded and left the room, one after the other.

"Now that they're both gone, I believe I will tell you something," Professor Dumbledore said to his remaining teachers. "Severus was not trying to harm Mr. Potter, but protect him. It was Quirinus attacking the broomstick." The three teachers' mouths were hanging

slightly open in shock, though Professor McGonagall closed hers quickly.

"Please, keep an eye on him like Severus has been doing. We must not allow him to get to the Stone, so we may be in danger. I have a very bad feeling that Lord Voldemort is somewhere in this mess, though where I have no idea."

"I know it is probably your first instinct to have me get rid of Quirrell, but we must be able to keep an eye on him so that we can keep the Stone safe. If we allow him to leave, he might just find another way to get to it, and then we won't have any warning at all as to when it will happen. I will do everything in my power to keep our students safe from Quirrell; you all have my word on that. Just trust me, and nothing will happen."

The three professors could say nothing in response to this, so they left the room in silence, all three thinking about what Professor Dumbledore had just told them. They had known the Stone was in the school for protection, but not that it was from You-Know-Who. They truly didn't know what to think except that they trusted Professor Dumbledore with their lives.

Back in his office, Professor Dumbledore was wondering about many things: The Stone, his DADA teacher, and most importantly, a Mr. Harry James Potter.

I got a comment on the last chapter about my spelling and grammar on the other site (SIYE) I post this on, so I thought I'd mention two things. One, I am the only person who writes this. I have absolutely no Beta; I write and edit this whole thing myself. All I have is a lovely friend addicted to my story who loves to read the chapters I send her as I finish them and comment/suggest things. (*Cough* Yes Ana, this is you. =P) Two, I'm American, so any British terms are from reading FF like a maniac and picking up on some of them. Correct me if I mess something up, but I'll mostly be using American terms.

Otherwise, I hope you enjoyed this version of how I think Halloween/Quidditch could have gone if Hermione had had friends and Harry had been on the Slytherin team. Maybe review and let me know what you thought of it? :)

Edit: Anyone who saw the first version needs to realize that I figured out from a couple of reviews that I needed to explain Dumbledore's actions a bit more as well as the other teachers', so I added some stuff to this chapter. Thanks!

Posted: 11/14/10

Chapter Seven

Harry walked into the Great Hall the morning after the Quidditch match to a purple spell hitting him from the direction of the Weasley twins. He took one look at the Slytherin table and sighed quietly while groaning internally. The twins had managed to hit the whole team.

"Let me guess," Harry said to his staring Slytherin friends, "gold and crimson hair."

"How did you know?" Theo asked while the others looked just as surprised.

"They got the whole team," Harry said as he pointed at the Slytherin table where the rest of the team sat with varying amounts of Gryffindor colors covering their top half.

"How are you going to get it off?" Tracey asked curiously. Harry thought for a moment before he figured out the twins' logic behind it.

"Daphne, use Finite on me when we get to the table without making it obvious," Harry requested as the Slytherins walked to their table and ignored the looks, comments, and laughs of the Hall completely.

Daphne just nodded without questioning his request before she pulled her wand out of her robes while sitting down next to him with their backs to the Gryffindors. She muttered the spell under her breath, and Harry felt a tingling on his head and saw Tracey's confirming glance from across the table.

"The twins didn't expect a Slytherin to actually ask for help, so it only spreads when a person with the spell on them tries to counter it, not when someone else does," Harry explained.

"And they call us arrogant..." Theo muttered to the general agreement of the group.

"Potter." Harry turned to see Flint and the rest of the team looking at him. "How'd you get rid of the Gryffindor look?"

"Have someone without the spell counter it," Harry replied. If the answer surprised any of the team, they hid it well.

Soon enough the whole team was clean of all red and gold, and Professor Snape had come into the Hall, so the twins didn't dare try again. The rest of breakfast was peaceful, though the twins could be heard complaining about the ruined prank from across the Hall.

...

That afternoon, Harry was on his way down to Professor Snape's office from the library, where he and his Slytherin friends had gone to research something for potions, to ask him for a possible favor when he heard hushed voices in an empty classroom.

"-can't believe Hagrid owns that three-headed dog!" the familiar voice of Ron Weasley was saying.

"Or that he named it Fluffy!" Dean Thomas added.

"Or that," Ron agreed. "I guess to find out what it's guarding, we'll have to find Nicholas Flamel."

Both of the other boys agreed, but before Harry could hear anymore, footsteps in the room headed towards the door sent him down the hall and towards the dungeons.

Harry's mind was spinning as he tried to piece together all the information he had. On Halloween, he had seen Professor Quirrell try to get past the three-headed dog – Fluffy – in the forbidden corridor only to be stopped by Professor Snape, who got hurt in the process. Now Harry knew Ron Weasley and his friends had run into Fluffy, found out it was guarding something, and that it had to do with a Nicholas Flamel.

Before Harry knew it, he was outside Professor Snape's office. Taking a calming breath, Harry knocked on the door and entered when told to do so, closing the door before facing his Head of House. Harry barely took in the sight of the odd specimens in jars around him as he stood waiting for his professor to look up from his papers and acknowledge him. Harry had guessed he would be forced to wait, so he wasn't surprised.

Finally, Snape finished, looked up at Harry, and asked, "Yes, Potter? What is it?"

"Sir, did you happen to hear about this morning's prank?" Harry asked.

"I did."

"I was thinking... What if a potion was used to change them into Slytherin colors for let's say... two weeks?" Harry saw that he had his professor's attention and continued. "A charm can be countered, like this morning proved, but a potion is harder. If two potions are made, one for green and one for silver, so that they can last for a few months, the twins won't know what hit them as the revenge could come at any time." By then, Snape was smirking in a way that said he liked the idea.

"By coincidence, I know of a potion like that, both colors actually, that is easy to make and takes an hour at the most to brew. My classroom will be empty for the rest of the day and the potion just so happens to be written on the board. Now, leave, unless there's something else?"

Harry hesitated for a moment, thinking of the dog, before shaking his head and replying, "No, Sir, and thank you."

Harry went to the classroom, made the potions, labeled each carefully, and left, the room looking untouched. After putting the vials, which couldn't break, into his trunk, he went back to the library and told his friends about what he had overheard.

"Nicholas Flamel?" Theo asked to confirm the name.

"That's what they said."

"Weasley really is as stupid as he looks," Theo said as he shook his head sadly. "Any pureblood should know it."

"Flamel is an alchemist," Daphne explained when Harry opened his mouth to ask why. "A famous alchemist. He's also the maker and owner of the only Philosopher's Stone in existence. It can turn metal into gold and makes the Elixir of Life, which makes the drinker immortal."

"So the dog – Fluffy – must be guarding the Stone," Harry muttered while thinking that putting something as precious as that in a school was asking for trouble.

"Probably," Theo agreed.

"Well, now that we know all of this, we know why Quirrell wants to get past the dog, so we can warn Professor Snape if we think something's happening," Harry decided.

"Should we tell Snape we know?" Tracey asked quietly. The whole group shared a look.

"I think we should," Blaise said. "If he knows that we know, he'll believe us if we tell him things."

"Blaise has a point..." Daphne admitted slowly. "I think we should."

"Then let's go," Harry said as he got up and headed towards Snape's office for the second time that day.

When they got there, Harry knocked and the whole group entered when called. Snape looked up at the group, surprised to see all of them, but even more surprised to see Harry back.

"Something wrong with what we discussed before, Potter?" he asked.

"No, Sir, and thanks again for that." Snape nodded while Harry's friends hid their confusion because Harry had only told them that he had to speak to Snape, not what it was about. "We're here about the third floor corridor on the right-hand side." Snape's eyes widened as he realized what Harry meant.

"What about it?" he asked cautiously, though very few would pick up on his cautiousness.

"The dog – Hagrid named it Fluffy for some reason – is guarding something," Daphne stated.

"That something is owned by Nicholas Flamel," Tracey picked up.

"And the only thing he has of value is a stone," Blaise added.

"A stone known as the Philosopher's Stone, which can turn metal into gold and produces the Elixir of Life," Theo said in a monotone.

"Most importantly, Quirrell wants it," Harry finished forcefully.

Professor Snape stared at the five Slytherins in front of him, unable to believe that they had figured out the whole thing in just over two months of school. He now knew that the Stone wasn't safe if first years, given they were Slytherins and smart, could figure it out, then anyone could find and probably get it. Flamel had just gotten lucky that Dumbledore had the staff in the loop about the stone so that they could keep an eye on the corridor.

"Who else knows?" Snape sighed as he sat back in defeat. The five shared surprised looks as they hadn't expected Snape to give in.

"Only the five of us know everything, but Ron Weasley and his two friends know about the dog and that the protected belongs to Nicholas Flamel. Otherwise, we're pretty sure they don't know anything," Harry replied.

"Good," Snape said as he nodded. "We don't want more students to know if they don't have to. Now, why are you even telling me you know?"

"So that if we hear something, we can tell you and you'll actually believe us," Blaise stated.

"Plus, you can't move the Stone now. Quirrell wants it, knows it's in the corridor, and would be even more dangerous if he knew that his prize was taken," Tracey said softly, the quietest of the five friends as well as their entire year.

Snape's head hit the back of his chair as he realized his soft-spoken Slytherin was right; the Stone couldn't be moved. If they moved the Stone, Quirrell might do something to the students for revenge, or maybe something worse.

"I'll have to inform the Headmaster of your knowledge of the Stone." They all shared looks before shrugging in response, none really caring if Dumbledore knew. "You won't be punished as not only did you tell me of your knowledge, but it sounds like you came by it by

coincidence since you know what Weasley already knows." They all nodded to confirm his suspicions.

"Thank you for informing me. Please, if you hear or see anything else, let me know. Otherwise, I'll speak to the Headmaster and see what we can do."

...

Harry groaned as he threw himself onto his bed the night of Christmas Eve. The past two months or so had been full of Quidditch practice twice a week, learning new spells, writing essays, making potions, hanging out with both his large group of friends and his four Slytherin ones, and basically living life at Hogwarts.

Christmas break had begun a week before, and Harry was the only one out of all his friends to stay at Hogwarts, and that was from the large group of first years. In fact, the only other first year in the school was Ron Weasley as he and his three older brothers had stayed for the break. Otherwise, there were a couple of older Hufflepuffs and a couple of older Ravenclaws. Harry was the only Slytherin and the Weasleys the only Gryffindors.

Sighing slightly, Harry crawled under his blankets in the empty dorm and closed his eyes to fall asleep. While he would normally not expect gifts from anyone, he knew that his friends would be getting him something for Christmas just as he had gotten each of them something, so he knew he was going to get his first ever gifts the next morning. It made falling asleep harder, but he eventually fell asleep.

Luckily Harry was the only one in Slytherin as it meant he got to sleep until nine. He suspected that Gryffindor tower was full of loud Weasleys right then.

Looking at his moderate pile of gifts, he was amazed at the number of them. Not only did Theo, Blaise, Daphne, and Tracey get him gifts, but Susan, Hannah, Padma, Terry, Hermione, and Neville got him one each and the others all went together to get him a gift from the Ravenclaws and another from the Hufflepuffs.

Hermione had gotten him a handsome eagle feather quill while Neville got him a bottle of color-changing ink. Hannah and Susan

had each gotten him a different book on Wizarding Law as Harry was always interested in learning more about the wizarding world, especially with his Slytherin friends knowing so much about it. Padma and Terry had also worked together to get him books on Wizarding Traditions. The Ravenclaws had gotten him a large package of chocolate frogs, and the Hufflepuffs had gotten him a large package of sugar quills.

Harry finally turned to the four gifts from his friends and a fifth that wasn't signed. Harry opened Theo's gift first to find a few different books on fighting magic as DADA was Harry's best class even though they had a terrible teacher. As it turned out, each of his friends had gotten him books on different subjects; Daphne had gotten him Potions, which Harry had actually found he liked after Snape had helped him with the prank potions he had yet to use as Snape had stopped ignoring him and treated him like any other Slytherin; Tracey had gotten him Charms, some of them fun charms and others more serious; Blaise had gotten him Transfiguration, and one of them even talked about animagi, or turning into an animal.

Smiling at the gifts his friends had gotten him, he turned to the last present on his bed. Picking it up, he realized it was amazingly light. Opening it slowly, the present was revealed to be a gleaming, silvery gray cloak that was fluid and felt like water woven into material. Harry didn't know what it was, so he decided to go try it on and see what it looked like.

Standing in front of the full mirror in his wardrobe, he put on the cloak and was amazed when everything of him went invisible except his head, which also went invisible when he pulled the hood up and over his head. His only reaction was a gasp when he first saw himself because his mind was already racing about what he could do with the cloak. The first thing on his list was to play the prank on the twins.

Just as he turned back to his bed to change and grab the potions, he noticed a note on his bed that must have been with the cloak. Picking it up, he read the loopy handwriting.

Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you.

Use it well.

A Very Happy Christmas to you.

It had no signature, but Harry didn't care. He finally had something that belonged to his one of his parents. Closing his eyes against his tears, Harry held the clock reverently in his hands and he ran his fingers through the material over and over. He imagined his dad, who everyone said he looked like except for his eyes, getting under the cloak and sneaking around the school.

Getting a hold of himself, Harry quickly got dressed and grabbed the potions. Once he was in the Common Room, he slipped the cloak on and made sure it covered all of him, which it did easily. Walking as quietly as possible, he went to the Great Hall and was pleased to see the twins eating heartily at the Gryffindor table.

Harry snuck up behind them and put the potions in their drinks, careful not to do it when they were looking and to not touch them at all. Once they were in the goblets, Harry quickly snuck out of the Great Hall, went into the stairwell that led to the Slytherin dorms, pulled off the cloak, and reentered the Great Hall visible.

When Harry looked around the Hall, he had to fight back a laugh when he saw one twin was pure silver, except for his clothes, and the other was emerald green. Smirking at the sight, he walked over towards them, pretending to play the amazed Slytherin who had just walked in to see two Gryffindors in Slytherin colors. When he got there, he saw the twins trying everything to get the color off, but they didn't realize it was a potion and not a spell.

"So, which of you is going to tell your captain that you've switched teams?" Harry asked as he took a seat next to the twins to look at them, though he was planning to go eat at his own table unless invited to stay.

"Switched –" one twin started.

"–Teams?" the other finished.

"Why of course," Harry stated, having the time of his life. "I mean, except for the robes, you're most certainly Slytherins now, right? Otherwise, why would you have spelled one another to be Slytherin colors?"

The twins stared at him in horror as they realized what he meant before going back to trying to Finite the color off of them once again. When they finally realized it wasn't going to come off, they turned to Harry pleadingly.

"Please take this off," they said at the same time with a pleading tone in their voices.

"Who said I'm the one that did it?" Harry asked, pretending to be insulted to have been suspected. "I only came over here to see why two Slytherins were at the Gryffindor table before I realized who it was. Besides, what Slytherin wouldn't enjoy and laugh at the sight, especially after what you tried to do to our team."

"You're the only Slytherin in the school right now," one twin stated.

"So you have to be the one to have pranked us," the other added.

"What? No one else in the school could make it so that two Gryffindors were in Slytherin colors but a Slytherin?"

"Well, yes –" the silver twin started.

"– They could," the green one added.

"But that would bring upon our wrath," they finished together.

"Besides, we know those four in the other houses and they wouldn't do this, so that only leaves you," the silver added.

"Hmm... smart, but how did I do it?" Harry asked, knowing that it would throw them off.

The twins shared a look before replying in sync, "We have no idea."

"Then you can't prove it was me as I have no way to do the prank."

"Oh, it was you."

"But you have sneaky ways that we don't know of."

"Either way, you pranked us well."

"So we have to commend you, Mr. Potter, on a job well done."

"Now please get rid of the color!" they pleaded together.

"Sorry, boys, but I can't help," Harry stated while he decided to eat with the twins and grabbed some toast and eggs. "Besides, the rest of the school needs to see your new and improved colors."

"WHAT?"

"Don't worry; the color will fade... eventually."

"How long is eventually?" one twin asked slowly, as if afraid of the answer.

"Two weeks?" Harry made it sound like a question.

"TWO WEEKS?" they both yelled, earning them a glare from Professor Snape, the only teacher still in the Hall, by coincidence.

"We can't stay like this for two weeks!"

"We'll be the laughingstock of the school!"

"And it won't be for a prank we pulled!" The twins both looked horrified at that fact, which amused Harry even more as he finished his eggs and grabbed some bacon.

"Sorry, boys, but I can't help," Harry said after he swallowed. "It's out of my hands now. You'll have to wait for it to wear off."

The twins groaned and fell silent as all three of them ate their breakfast, neither of them commenting on Harry's eating at the Gryffindor table. Harry knew it was because of the prank as well as the fact that Ron wasn't there as Ron would have yelled until he left his table. The twins didn't talk again until all three were done and Harry was about to get up to go back to the Slytherin dorms to read some of the DADA books Theo had gotten him.

"Hey, Harry?" one of the twins asked.

"Yeah?" Harry turned to face the colored boys.

"We know we haven't been the nicest of people to you because you're a Slytherin," the silver twin said.

"But we've been thinking all of breakfast, and we've realized something that most haven't," the emerald green twin said.

"You're an okay guy," both said as one twin held out his right hand and the other his left so that Harry had to cross his arms to shake both of them at once.

"Thanks," he replied with a smile. "I'm glad someone in Gryffindor besides Hermione and Neville has finally realized it. I don't have friends in all of the Houses for no reason, you know."

"We see that now," silver said.

"But we didn't want to admit it to ourselves before," emerald finished.

"Glad to have some more Gryffindor friends... if we are friends," Harry added hesitantly.

"Of course," emerald said forcefully.

"Anyone who can prank as well as this," silver gestured down at himself, "is a friend in our books."

"And is also a good person, no matter what House," emerald added.

"Great, but I really can't help you, and you're not finding out how I did it just yet," Harry stated as it was obvious those were the two things that the twins wanted.

"Oh well," they both sighed.

"Oh, Harry, we might be able to get some more Gryffindors on your side," emerald said out of nowhere.

"Yeah! The Gryffindor team already respects you for your flying, and once we tell them that you're a good person, the reservations they have will disappear."

"Besides, all of the team agreed after the game that you were someone we'd befriend if we knew what sort of person you were and you turned out to be good."

"Well, the whole team besides Wood. He doesn't seem to care about anything beyond Quidditch." Harry snickered as he had heard stories about Oliver Wood and how he ran his team ragged through practice.

"So, we'll see if we can get you more friends," emerald stated.

"And maybe we can pull some pranks together."

"I'd like that," Harry admitted, "but they can't be on Slytherin or Professor Snape, and I can't be shown as involved in them to anyone except friends. Basically, if the Quidditch team decides to be friends and you trust them, I'll trust them. My Slytherin friends will know, but only them. Deal?"

"Deal," both twins said. All three boys shook on it.

"Maybe, after a bit, we can trade tricks," one twin said hopefully.

"We'll see," Harry said with a secretive smile on his face. The twins had identical smiles on their faces as well.

Just as Harry was about to say something, Ron walked into the Great Hall, spotted him, and began marching towards the three. Ron was obvious furious at the sight of Harry at the Gryffindor Table, but the fact that the twins were letting him sit there seemed to set him over the edge.

"What is he doing here?" he yelled at the three boys, drawing the attention of Professor Snape until Harry looked up at him and shook his head slightly.

"Our friend is enjoying a Christmas breakfast with us, Ronnikins," the silver twin said.

"Speaking of which, Happy Christmas Harry," the emerald twin said for both of them.

"Happy Christmas, Emerald, Silver," Harry replied, using those nicknames just to spite the twins and to make them laugh, which it did. It also made it so that Ron realized that his twin brothers were the colors of Slytherin.

"Why are you both in Slytherin colors?" Ron asked angrily, as if expecting they had done it on purpose just to spite him.

"Oh, just trying out a new look," silver said.

"We're showing our true colors," emerald added.

"Well, Harry, ready to go?" silver asked as both twins pushed their empty plates away.

"Yup; let's go," Harry said as he stood and walked towards the doors to the Great Hall, completely ignoring Ron and fighting back a smile at the fact that he now had the Weasley twins on his side and he might just get more Gryffindors into his growing group of friends through them.

The first thing I have to comment on is the potions and Snape. I know I'll be getting comments on it, so I'm just going to point out one little fact: Snape's dislike of the twins is greater than his dislike of Harry in this story, so he's willing to help Harry get revenge on the twins.

My other little note is about Flamel, the Stone, and the Slytherins knowing it. It just seems a bit odd to me that Ron didn't know about a someone as famous as him except that Ron can be a bit thick a lot of the time. I just see the Slytherins knowing about him even though Ron didn't in canon.

Well, now you all can see where I'm going with the Stone, so you can see it'll be different. Thanks for reading! :)

Oh, the Seventh Movie is amazing! :) My aunt wants to go see it Tuesday, so I get to see it twice within a week without even planning it. :D Love it.

Posted: 11/21/10

Chapter Eight

The week following Christmas that led up to the other students returning was much more fun for Harry than the first. With the twins as friends, he was never bored. Whether they were teaching Harry spells of all kinds or planning pranks with him, the twins kept him busy.

Three times that week the three of them went outside for snowball fights. Ron even joined the second one, though it was obvious by his words and actions that he had only done it to hit Harry, which wasn't an easy task as Harry's reflexes were very sharp after ten years with the Dursleys; the fact that he played Quidditch didn't hurt his reflexes either.

All of Harry's friends had expected to come back to a gloomy Harry, but instead, they walked into the Entrance Hall as a group to see a smiling Harry with an excited gleam in his eyes that said he had something to tell them. After they all thanked one another for the gifts, Theo got tired of waiting and asked Harry what was up.

Smiling evilly, Harry called out, "Silver! Emerald! The school is back!"

Much to the surprise of everyone who had gone home for the break, especially the girls on the Gryffindor team, two boys stepped out of the shadows, one silver and the other emerald green. When everyone realized that they were the Weasley twins, the entire Entrance Hall burst out in laughter while a few asked how and why they had done it, but the twins only smiled and shook their heads. Both boys moved towards Harry and wrapped an arm around his shoulders, which surprised everyone but Harry as he had gotten used to it finally.

"We decided over the break –" the silver twin, who happened to be Fred, began.

"Before the break, but we did it over the break," George interrupted.

"Yes, we decided we'd show our true colors, so on Christmas Eve –"

"Christmas morning," George interjected.

"We turned our bodies green and silver," Fred finished.

"We'll go back to our fake selves in a week," George announced.

"OW!" both boys suddenly exclaimed as the hands not over Harry's shoulders went to their ribs while they glared down at Harry, who only smiled and raised an eyebrow at them. Sighing, they both gave in to his wishes.

"Since our young friend here doesn't like our statement –" Fred began while looking down at Harry.

"We're going to tell you what he wishes us to," George finished as they both sighed dramatically, which earned snorts from many people, Harry included.

"We were pranked over the break," Fred stated, sounding sad. Every person in the Hall froze at that.

"You see, we were careless and thought that none of the few students still at this lovely school would prank us, so we let our guards down," George said dramatically.

"Our young friend Mr. Potter here took advantage of our weakness and made us Slytherin mascots in Gryffindor."

"He won't tell us how he did it or why it lasts for two weeks, but he tells us it will wear off."

"So until it does, we're Slytherins residing in Gryffindor tower."

Everyone stared at the twins and then Harry, who smiled innocently and waved. No one could believe that the twins had been pranked, but the proof was right in front of them. Then, the four females on the Gryffindor Quidditch team step right up to the trio.

"Well, Harry, if you managed to prank these two idiots, you can't be all bad, right girls?" Angelina Johnson said with a smile. The other girls all nodded with their own smiles.

"Why thank you, Angelina," Harry replied, a small smile forming on his face.

With that, more of the students in the Great Hall began moving towards the group and some congratulated Harry on a prank-well-done. Harry could tell that this one moment might have just gotten him some more friends in the higher years, which was one of the things keeping the smile on his face.

...

The next few months went by quickly for Harry after that. Once he had explained how the prank had worked to his Slytherin friends and the twins, a plan was made for the Leaving Feast with another potion Professor Snape helped them make. The twins did the work with Harry helping as much as he could as it was a much more complicated potion.

Harry's Head of House was skeptical at first about helping the twins, but when Harry explained that his helping them meant Slytherin House would only get pranked if another House, almost always Gryffindor, was pranked as well. It was a good deal that meant Slytherin wouldn't be singled out anymore.

Otherwise, Harry's group grew again in the first week back after Christmas. Not only did all of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, besides the captain Oliver Wood, join the group, but so did fourth year Hufflepuff Cedric Diggory. The new additions to the group helped the first years with homework and spells in a huge way, and they learned more than ever before.

Harry and the other Slytherins kept a close eye on Ron Weasley and his two friends, but they didn't seem to be having much luck with the information they had, so they weren't all that worried. They were only keeping an eye on them to pick up new information to pass onto one of the Head of Houses or the Headmaster.

Quidditch training took up a lot of his time, and Slytherin demolished Ravenclaw in January while they just managed to pull a victory against Hufflepuff in May. Even if Gryffindor won their last match against Ravenclaw, they would need well over three hundred points to even tie for the Cup with Slytherin, so the team was feeling very good about itself.

In the end, Gryffindor only managed two hundred points, so Slytherin was awarded the Quidditch Cup for the eighth year in a

row, which made Professor Snape very happy. It seemed not a single Slytherin could fault their Head of House for getting a first year onto the Quidditch team.

The only thing that was off in the last half of the year was Draco Malfoy. As winter turned to spring and spring to summer, Draco began talking to Harry more, especially during Potions. It seemed, to Harry and his other friends when he mentioned it, that Draco had taken the words spoken in the Headmaster's office on the first day of classes to heart.

The group heard him saying Muggle-born instead of Mudblood more and more; he stopped picking fights with others; he, and his friends by default, stopped harassing their classmates from other Houses; he was literally becoming like Harry and his friends. The Slytherins had even seen him hovering by their table in the Common Room, library, and class. They knew it wouldn't be long before he asked to join the group, and he'd be welcomed in.

End of Year Exams were upon the students, and to Harry, they all sort of merged into one another so that the week passed by quickly. It wasn't until the last exam was done and everyone had gone outside to relax that anything interesting occurred.

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Harry flopped himself onto the ground under a tree by the lake after throwing his bag down, sighing in relief. Theo, Daphne, Tracey, and Blaise all mimicked him. The exams were finally over! They were free for an entire week before they found out how they had done, and they finally got to relax.

"Finally!" Harry sighed in relief. "I thought exams would never be over."

"I know what you mean," Theo said. "I thought my hand was going to fall off from all that writing."

"My hand is still cramping," Blaise complained as he shook his left hand out.

"I'll never understand why they have to torture us with these exams," Daphne groaned as she lay down on the ground and closed her

eyes. "And I know it's to test our gain in knowledge and to see where we are, Tracey," she added without even opening her eyes as Tracey opened her mouth to retort.

"Humph," Tracey grunted, crossing her arms over her chest and turning away from her friend in annoyance.

"Well, whatever happens, we're done," Harry said in relief as he leaned against the tree and closed his eyes.

The five Slytherins sat or lay under the tree in silence for a while, just relaxing and enjoying the fact that they were finally done for the year. They were all listening to the sounds of kids relaxing, the twins messing around with the giant squid in the lake, and some kids running around. It was a very peaceful atmosphere that showed how relieved everyone was that it was all over.

After a while, Daphne sat up and grabbed a deep purple journal from her bag along with her quill and ink. Tracey, seeing what Daphne had grabbed, snatched her own ink and quill from her bag while pulling out a smaller version of the journal Daphne had from her pocket that grew into a royal blue journal the same size as Daphne's. They both began writing in their own journals, taking turns writing in it.

The very odd actions had been going on for five minutes before Theo noticed and pointed it out to Blaise. Each boy took out his own quill, ink, and journal; Blaise had gray while Theo had a dark green. Both boys began writing so that it seemed that there was always one of the four friends writing at a time.

Harry, who had heard the moment they had taken out the journals, was listening to their quills writing on the parchment in the journals. Cracking an eye open, he recognized the journals as the ones they used while doing homework in the library. They were the journals that made it so that his friends were sometimes hiding smirks, smiles, and laughs while writing in them. He didn't know what exactly they were, but he knew that if he waited, he'd find out.

Finally, after a good fifteen minutes of writing in the journals, the four friends put them on the ground, still open. Tracey reached into her bag and pulled out a fifth journal, this one an emerald green that matched Harry's eyes.

"Harry?" His eyes flew open as he turned to face his four friends, his eyes going to the fifth journal in Tracey's hands right away.

"Yeah?" he asked quietly.

"This is for you," Tracey said as she held out the emerald green journal to their friend.

Harry took the journal and was surprised to find it was soft leather that had been dyed and spelled so that, while it felt soft, it wouldn't be able to bend except at the binding. Then Harry looked at the book more closely. On the back at the bottom in silver was his name. That wasn't the oddest part of it, though. No, that was the shape.

He opened the book and was met with another cover also in leather. It was a three-fold journal.

When he opened the second fold, his eyebrows went to his hairline in surprise as he looked at the inside of the journal. On the leftmost and the rightmost folds there was a piece of parchment stuck on each. In the middle was a pad of parchment, most likely charmed to never run out. All three were completely blank.

Looking up at his friends, he raised his eyebrows and waited for an explanation.

"We call these Messenger Journals, or Journals for short," Theo said. Harry just raised his eyebrows again, waiting for a real answer.

"Put your left index finger to the leftmost page, Harry," Daphne informed him.

Shrugging slightly, he did as he was told, and was amazed beyond belief. The moment his finger touched the page, the entire inside of the journal transformed. The right page got a box at the bottom right that said Show. The middle page stayed the same, but the left page changed dramatically.

There was suddenly two lists; one that said On and the other that said Off. Under the on list were the names Harry, Daphne, Theo, Blaise, and Tracey.

Harry's head flashed up as he looked at his friends. All of them smiled at him but Tracey, who was writing in her own journal. When she looked up again, Harry looked down at his own journal, and was surprised to see something on the middle page.

Tracey: These journals can send messages between them. Whatever you write and "show," anyone that's on the "On" list will see it. My father made and charmed them himself. He told me he's willing to make as many as I want or need. We asked him to make this for you a few weeks ago. It will turn on only for you, but anyone can write in it once it's on. If it's not on, it works just like a normal notebook, though you write in the right page and it transfers to the middle one, which can be turned into a roll of parchment with your wand.

Harry was surprised to see that the writing was in Tracey's own handwriting. He grabbed his own ink and quill so that he could try it himself.

Harry: So we can take notes and do homework in these things?

Daphne: Basically. I did my homework in here more than once, and all of my notes were taken in it. The parchment never runs out.

Theo: We've had these for a few years, but this is the first time we've have someone to give a new one to.

Blaise: Tracey's father made them for us when we were eight so that we could talk even when we couldn't see each other for a while. Pureblood families can't always get together, so the children get very bored a lot.

Harry: So I can use this while in the Muggle world, right?

Tracey: I asked my father when I first wrote to ask for one. He said that, as the magic is all in the book and not you using it now that it's been charmed, the sensors won't go off because you use it.

Daphne: Not even the shrinking and growing part?

Harry: The what part?

Tracey: No, Daph. And, Harry, she's talking about how if you put your left index finger on your name on the back, it shrinks. It grows if you do the same thing when it's small. That's how it was in my pocket before.

Harry: Oh... Cool! That means the Dursleys can't – Nevermind...

Theo: Who are the Dursleys?

Harry: My relatives.

Daphne: What would they do if they saw the journal, Harry?

Harry: Nothing. Don't worry about it.

Blaise: Harry...

Harry: It's nothing. Don't worry about it. Now, I think we're getting odd looks, so we should put these away for now.

The others all looked up and saw that Harry was right. Other students were looking oddly at them because they were not only writing after exams were done, but they weren't talking.

All of them closed their journals and shrunk them to put in their pockets, quills and ink going back into bags. After that, they all went back to their relaxing positions to relax for a while longer as there were still at least three good hours before dinner.

...

Harry looked up from his place the tree an hour later to see Ron Weasley and his two friends rushing up to the castle from Hagrid's hut by the forest. He raised an eyebrow, grabbed the Cloak from his bag, and followed them. His friends just saw where he was going and went back to relaxing.

Slipping into the shadows, Harry used both the darkness and his cloak to keep himself invisible to the trio as they stopped not far from the doors to the grounds to talk.

"Hagrid would just tell Snape how to get past Fluffy!" Ron Weasley was saying. "I mean, you don't just tell a hooded person how to put the thing to sleep, drunk or not!"

"We can't let Snape get past Fluffy and steal whatever's below that trapdoor!" Seamus Finnegan said.

Harry had to try hard not to snort. The boys still hadn't figured out that the Stone was under that trapdoor, and they had the information firsthand that Harry and his friends had gained secondhand to figure it all out.

"I still can't believe Hagrid let the idea of having his own dragon put aside his best interests," Dean Thomas said as he shook his head. "I mean, letting someone who just so happens to have an egg with them chat with you about creatures when you've got Fluffy guarding something is just not what you do. Especially if the guy is getting you drunk!"

"Either way, he's done it, and now we've got to stop Snape from getting down there!" Ron said quite loudly in Harry's opinion.

"How?" Seamus asked reasonably.

"Why don't we go down the trapdoor ourselves tonight?" Dean asked.

"A great idea, Dean!" Ron said, smiling at his friend.

With that, Ron and his friends seemed to realize they were still close to the Entrance Hall and decided to go up to their dorm to plan some more as they knew Neville was outside with Hermione and a few others from the group. Harry sunk to the floor against the wall with the cloak still over him as he mulled over what he had just heard.

From what the trio had said, Quirrell knew how to get past Fluffy because Hagrid, the owner of the thing, had gotten drunk at a bar, most likely in Hogsmeade, and had begun talking with a man who just so happened to have a dragon's egg in his pocket! Now the trio wanted to stop him, though they thought the man was Snape, a fact that still made Harry have to hold in a snort. The three didn't even know what was beyond Fluffy, the idiots.

Though, Harry did have to admit that the idiots did have fair points when it came to Hagrid's stupidity in telling the hooded man how to get past a three-headed dog that just so happened to be guarding the Philosopher's Stone at Hogwarts.

Harry was about to get up and go tell his friends what had happened so that they could tell Professor Snape when Professor McGonagall came down the hall and he got a better idea. He whipped off his cloak and slipped out of the shadows, rushing to catch up to his professor as she headed up the marble staircase.

"Professor! Professor McGonagall!" Harry called as he chased her up the stairs.

"Yes, what is it Potter?" she asked, obviously forcing herself not to snap, make a face, or some other thing she always seemed to do with him because he wasn't in Gryffindor, her House, like his parents.

"I've got something you need to hear, Professor," he managed to pant as he tried to catch his breath. "It's about the you-know-what on the third floor."

With that one statement, her entire demeanor changed and she ordered him to follow her to her office, which was on the first floor. When they got there, she closed and locked her door before doing something to it. Harry guessed they were privacy and silencing wards, but he couldn't know for sure as they wouldn't be studying them until at least fifth year. She then gestured for him to sit.

"What did you find out, Potter?" she asked sharply once she was seated behind her very organized, Gryffindor-colored desk.

"Ron Weasley, Dean Thomas, and Seamus Finnegan were talking with Hagrid, I gathered, and then went to the hallway right by the Entrance Hall. While there, I heard them talking about how Hagrid told a hooded man how to get past Fluffy, his three-headed dog that guards the Stone on the third floor, because he was drunk and talking with him. They think he's Professor Snape, but I know it's Quirrell. He knows how to get to the Stone, and with Professor Dumbledore gone for the night, it's the perfect time."

"How do you know the Headmaster isn't in the school?" Professor McGonagall asked sharply in her shock.

"I'm a Slytherin for a reason, Professor," Harry replied with an eyebrow raised, but one look at her face told him to just tell her. "That and I saw man with a silver beard who could only be the Headmaster flying towards the gates on what looked like nothing but thin air. No broom or anything else. Then I remembered reading somewhere that we have a herd of thestrals here at Hogwarts, so I'm guessing he was riding one. Either way, he only leaves on important business, which means he probably won't be back until morning."

Professor McGonagall stared at the boy in front of her who acted much older than his eleven years. He – and his Slytherins friends as well – had figured out so much with so little information. She realized, looking at the boy in front of her, that with he and his friends in the school, the next six years would be very interesting.

"Very well," she finally said. "Rest assured, the right people will be informed and the Stone protected. Now, before you go, is there anything else I should know?"

"Uh... I might be having my Gryffindor friends stay up late to keep Ron and his friends from going after the Stone, though they don't know it's the Philosopher's Stone," Harry admitted after a moment of fighting with himself about telling her.

Professor McGonagall raised an eyebrow before replying. "Very well. Just make sure those twins don't harm their brother. Have one of the others take care of them and the twins there as backup."

"Got it; thanks Professor."

"No, thank you, Mr. Potter. You might have just saved the Stone," Professor McGonagall replied with the first smile she'd ever had for Harry, even if it was a very small one.

Harry left the room quickly after that and went back down to his friends, telling them quickly what had happened and what he had done. They were all happy he had told someone, though they wished he could have told them about it first.

When they were all talked out, they went and grabbed dinner in the Great Hall, all five of them sharing a look with their Professors at the

table to tell them that they knew. They told Hermione and the other Gryffindors to stay up late, hidden, so that they could stop the trio from leaving the Common Room that night. While the five couldn't explain why they needed it done, they got the point across that it was important and had to do with the professors. They all promised to do it.

Once they were done, the Slytherins all went to their dorms and took out the journals to write so that Harry could get used to it and so that they could talk about things like the Stone in private.

All in all, all five were relieved that they didn't have to do anything more about the Stone. They had done their part, and it was up to the teachers to do the rest.

I give credit where it is due, so I'm admitting that the very basic idea for the Journals comes from An Aunt's Love by Emma Lipardi on . In her story she has small books that, when written in, the other books show the exact same thing. Not like my Journals, which you will see in the future of this story are very different, but that idea gave me the idea for my Journals, so I'm just letting you all know.

Now, I hope you enjoyed my little welcome back gift to the school. It was so much fun writing that. :) Otherwise, the Journals were just something that came to me, and now they're one of the most important things in the series, but enough about those Journals. =P The next chapter begins differently, but it ends the school year... FINALLY. I'm sorry, but the only school year I didn't like writing as much as this one is year four, and that's only because I'm not at the good parts yet.

Let me know what you thought of this, please. :-D

Posted: 11/28/10

Chapter Nine

Professor Quirrell set his conjured harp to play a soft song to keep the three-headed dog asleep. He then sent down the trapdoor a few fireballs followed by a cushioning charm before jumping into the hole in the floor. The charm did the trick and he didn't feel a thing besides a soft floor when he landed; the Devil's Snare was nowhere in sight.

In the room with the flying keys, he used a spell that located the right key before countering the charm on it so that he could summon it, which he did. Once in the room with the chessboard, Quirrell used a spell his master was whispering into his mind to force all the chess pieces away from him so that he could just walk through the door, the pieces resetting themselves behind him.

He made quick work with the troll, trolls being his specialty. It was out cold before the thing could even realize he wasn't alone anymore. Then he listened to his master again to get a spell that allowed him to walk right through the black flames without needing to figure out which of Snape's potions was the correct one.

What he found on the other side of the fire, however, wasn't what he had expected. Standing in front of an elegant mirror were the four Heads of House: Professors McGonagall, Snape, Flitwick, and Sprout. Quirrell realized then and there that they had known all along that he was after the Stone, but it was too late for him to do anything about it.

Each of the four teachers raised his or her wand, but Quirrell had his own wand out and blocked the stunners aimed at him. Moving fast, a duel began full of shields, stunners, body-binds, and darker curses Quirrell was using under orders of his master.

Ten minutes after he had entered the chamber with the mirror that held the Philosopher's Stone, Quirrell was finally hit with a full body-bind. He felt a burning pain as his master left him, a dark shadow suddenly appearing above his now dead body.

Lord Voldemort was furious that his plan had been figured out and foiled. He charged out of the chamber through the black flames in the doorway and out of Hogwarts itself.

The four professors were healing one another when the Headmaster rushed into the chamber to find it empty of everything but the mirror, his four professors, and Quirrell's body. He realized what had happened and sighed in relief before asking what had happened. Once he knew the full story, Professor Dumbledore knew that he had some points to give to Slytherin at breakfast the next morning.

Overall, everyone was relieved that no one had been hurt and that the stone was still safe and in the mirror. No harm had come of this. They all owed Harry Potter and his four Slytherin friends a huge thanks for what they had done to save the Stone. Most students would have kept the information to themselves and gone after the Stone when they had heard about the person knowing, sort of how Ron Weasley and his friends had done. This was one of many times the professors, mainly Dumbledore and Snape, were relieved Harry James Potter was a Slytherin and not a Gryffindor.

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Professor Dumbledore stood up at the breakfast the next morning once everyone was there to eat. The entire Hall went silent in respect for the great wizard.

"Thank you. Now, I've got some personal thanks and points to give out this morning. I know it seems that I have no reason, but you shall all understand soon enough.

"First and foremost, I must give Tracey Davis, Theodore Nott, Daphne Greengrass, and Blaise Zabini twenty-five points apiece. The four of them along with one other informed the professors of something they had heard and figured out going on in the school. This information helped save a priceless artifact being kept in the school from the hands of someone who wanted to steal it.

"I must also give Harry Potter forty points for his quick thinking last night. He received information that told us when the robbery was going to take place and it permitted many of us to protect the artifact. Sadly, Professor Quirrell lost his life while we were down there, so he will not be teaching with us again.

"My final points are five points each for Miss Johnson, Miss Bell, Miss Spinnet, Miss Granger, Misters Fred and George Weasley, Miss Stimpson, and Mister Longbottom. They each did something

not many would do. Many people are willing to stand up to other Houses and enemies, but these eight stood up to their own Housemates without even knowing why. In fact, they stopped said Housemates from going out and possibly getting themselves harmed. So they earn those points for saving their Housemates and for standing up to their own.

"Please recognize these people, but do not question them. None know exactly what happened last night." With that, Professor Dumbledore sat down, and the entire Hall burst out into whispers.

...

Harry groaned slightly in annoyance as he opened his eyes the afternoon before the Leaving Feast to see who had moved his feet to the ground to find Daphne sitting where his feet had just been resting peacefully on the couch in the Common Room.

"Daphne!" he complained.

"You need to share the couch, Harry," she replied as she made herself comfortable and ignored Harry's mutters under his breath.

Harry turned at he heard people settling onto the couch next to his and saw Theo and Tracey sitting down while Blaise took one of the two chairs opposite them. While it was normal for the group to sit like that, though who sat where was usually different every time, the fact that all of his friends had decided to make a circle around him at exactly the same time made Harry suspicious that there was an ulterior motive.

"What is going on?" he demanded. The others all looked at one another, as if deciding who should start.

"Harry," Daphne said as she started the conversation, "you've been acting odd ever since the end of exams."

"More specifically," Blaise took over, "you've been acting weird ever since the Dursleys were brought up." The four friends watched as Harry flinched and then shivered slightly at just the name.

"You've been acting like you don't want to go home for the summer since then," Tracey added as an afterthought, or so it looked.

"You're right, Trace," Theo said, a bit surprised as he hadn't picked up on it though the girls had. "Don't you want to go home, Harry?"

"Do I want to go home?" Harry snorted at the thought. "I'd rather spend the summer with Ron Weasley, without the twins there." His friends all stared at him in shock as he said that, unable to believe he'd rather be with that Gryffindor than his family.

"How is that possible?" Daphne asked.

"I don't want to go back to the Dursleys, okay?" Harry snapped, angry by the topic of the conversation, not because of his friends. "Just leave it alone."

Harry was about to leave when someone unexpected came up to the group: Draco Malfoy. Harry froze, half sitting and half standing.

"Can I talk to you all?" Draco asked nervously. Harry sat down again.

"Sure. What's up, Draco?" he said for all of them while Daphne gestured for Draco to take the empty seat next to Blaise, which he did.

"I don't know how to say this any other way, so I'm just going to be blunt," Draco said as he gained more courage from their friendliness. "I want to be friends with you and in your group, but it has to look like an alliance to all but your closest friends."

"Why?" Daphne asked as she became the voice of the group, knowing the most about alliances of them all.

"My father," Draco replied and Daphne's face showed realization for a moment before she turned to her friends.

"Draco's father wants him to have an alliance with us – Harry to be more specific – but Draco himself wants to be friends. If we do it this way, it's a win-win for all of us. His father gets Draco in the alliance he wants, Draco gets his wish to be our friend, and we finally get Draco as our friend." Draco looked up in surprise at that as he hadn't realized they wanted to be his friend. "Do we agree with the idea?" The others all nod.

"We agree," Daphne said as she turned back to the young Malfoy.

"Terms?" Draco asked as he went into full-out alliance mode.

"Any terms for the alliance, you guys?" Daphne asked. "He's also asking for the friendship, if you didn't catch it," she added as an aside.

"None of your friends can join us during our study session or anything else, though you may," Tracey said immediately.

Draco nodded. "I quite agree. I noticed, as did you all I suspect, that I got the idiots and you're all the smart ones of Slytherin in our year." The group all nodded. "They'll be kept away."

"Good," Daphne said. "Anything else?"

"No more Mudblood at all except when you must for your father's sake," Harry said after a moment. "You only use Muggle-born, otherwise."

"I've been trying to do that anyway," Draco admitted quietly, as if ashamed.

"We've noticed," Blaise said. "It's what made us realize this would be coming soon. We were happy to see it." Draco smiled hesitantly as he was in completely new territory with all of this.

"Anything else?" Daphne asked as she had nothing else to add herself on top of the other terms.

"Any information you can get on your father's plans and actions?" Harry said, though he was more asking than requesting or ordering.

"Of course," Draco said. "I'd want to help as much as possible. Besides, that much I'd expected." He flashed them a more real smile.

"I believe we're done," Daphne said with a clap of her hands. "Do this again before the Feast to have witnesses? We'll just list the terms at that time, not try to talk them through again." Draco agreed readily and then left with a smile on his face none had seen before.

"He's different," Blaise commented.

"So are you, Blaise," Harry retorted as he made himself more comfortable on the couch, wishing Daphne hadn't taken his foot space. "You used to be against Muggle-borns, claiming Purebloods were ten times better than them, and now you think they're completely normal and even forget all about blood when you're with them. If that's not change from the beginning of the year, I don't know what is."

"How about how you've made it so that all of the first years besides Ron's group and the idiots in our own House think that none of the other Houses are different from their own except for traits so that they all work together?" Theo asked.

"Well, that too," Harry admitted with a nod in Theo's direction.

All of them laughed quietly as they realized how much Harry had done to the school in just their first year alone. Even they had to admit they were afraid to see how the next six years would turn out if he could change school politics around in one month of school.

...

Harry snuck out of the Great Hall after putting the potion into Dumbledore's goblet with his Cloak on even though it was a half hour before dinner. He and the twins had worked hard on the potion so that it would fit Snape's description to the letter. They didn't want anything to go wrong with this prank.

He returned to the Common Room to meet up with his friends before heading back up to the Great Hall to discuss the alliance formally with Draco. Daphne was the one to make them sit with Harry in between Theo and Blaise with Tracey and herself on either side of them. Draco sat in the same gender order when he and his friends got there.

"I've come to formally ask for an alliance with Harry James Potter and his friends," Draco said once he and his friends were seated across from Harry and his friends.

"We accept the alliance, but we have terms," Harry replied exactly how Daphne had taught him in the Common Room.

"The terms are?" Draco asked.

"The first is that your friends do not come near my friends except when forced to in class." Draco nodded his agreement to the first term like he was supposed to. "The second is to stop using the word 'Mudblood' and use 'Muggle-born' in its place." Again Draco nodded. "The third and final term is to talk freely with us no matter what the topic." Draco smiled slightly while he nodded his agreement as he recognized that the third was a hidden way of having him tell them about his father.

"As you agree to our terms, we agree to the alliance," Harry finished.

"And the alliance is sealed," Draco said to finish off the alliance.

Both boys stood up just moments before the Headmaster did, not having been paying attention to him as they had been making their alliance. Everyone had noticed the new seating arrangements and the talking, and they had all been surprised, but nothing surprised anyone, teacher, student, or ghost, more than Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy reaching across the Slytherin table and shaking hands in front of everyone. They sat down, looked around the Hall, realized what had happened, and looked up at the Headmaster to wait for the announcements.

Once Dumbledore had recovered from his shock and given his announcements, he gave a toast with his goblet and took a sip. The next thing anyone knew, he was suddenly the eight colors of the houses, only the silver and emerald matching the colors of the Hall as Slytherin had won the House Cup again.

His beard was emerald while the rest of his hair remained silver. One arm was half gold and half scarlet while the other was half blue and half bronze. His face was partially yellow while the rest was black. Professor Dumbledore was literally the perfect Headmaster as he fit into every single house because of his coloring.

It took a few moments for the shock of seeing the Headmaster change color to wear off, but once it had, everyone was laughing so hard that some could barely breathe, those who had known about the prank among them. All of the professors could be seen either smiling or laughing, including Snape and McGonagall. The four

Heads of House thanked Dumbledore for supporting their House just to make the joke that much funnier.

...

Harry sighed as he got off the Hogwarts Express at Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. He didn't want to go back to the Dursleys and even his friends had figured it out by then. Every single one of his friends from Hermione to the twins to Susan to Terry to Draco to Daphne knew. They had all tried to make his train ride fun, but it was hard when he really wasn't looking forward to the summer. He had to survive two and a half months with the Dursleys, who hated magic with a passion.

The young Slytherin took his wand out of his pocket and carefully slipped it up one of his pant legs and holding it in place with his sock so that no one would notice it was there, even if he sat. Harry wanted to be sure he'd keep his wand, even if he couldn't use it. It was better to have an unusable wand than to not have it, especially in the Dursley home.

His friends all noticed his actions and were confused by it. Not even their Muggle-born friends like Hermione were slipping their wands up their pants as if they would never see it again if they didn't. In fact, Hermione was very confused by Harry's actions, more confused than the Purebloods. The only ones who had an inkling of an idea didn't have a very large one, and this just added to their confusion.

Harry fingered his shrunken journal in his pocket, not noticing his friends' scrutiny, and tried to decide if being in his pants pocket was safe enough for it. With his uncle, one could never be too sure what he'd do to get all of Harry's school supplies. Harry had to be very careful how he did things so that he'd never get in trouble.

"Harry?" Hermione asked quietly from beside him as she walked over, making him jump before looking over.

"Yeah?" he asked, still a bit startled.

"Why are you hiding your wand?" she asked. "Not even my family would dare try to take away my stuff. No one else is trying to hide their stuff. What's going on at your home?"

"Nothing's going on at my house," he replied a little too quickly and harshly. "Now, I've got to get going. My uncle is probably waiting on the other side of the barrier."

Harry then hugged the girls, telling Daphne and Tracey that he'd write when he was in his room, and shook hands with the boys. All of his friends watched, worried, as he went through the barrier before sighing sadly, saying goodbye, and going off to find their own families.

On the other side of the barrier, Harry had found Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and their child, his cousin, Dudley waiting for him. He followed them to the car, put his trunk in the boot, and got into the backseat with Dudley, completely ignoring his entire family and wishing he was back at Hogwarts. Harry would rather be anywhere else but with his family.

...

When Harry and the Dursleys got back to Privet Drive, Uncle Vernon took his trunk and padlocked it into the cupboard under the stairs before padlocking Hedwig into her cage. Harry was allowed to bring her upstairs into his room with him, but he couldn't let her out as his uncle was afraid he'd sent notes to his friends. Luckily for Harry, he had his journal so he could still talk to four people.

The moment he entered his room, Harry was searching through the piles of Dudley's old stuff to try and find something to write with. He was surprised, lucky, and happy to find an unopened box of pre-sharpened pencils. Usually Dudley would have kept those sorts of things in his room, but Harry realized that Dudley hated school, so putting a brand new box of pencils in the second bedroom and saying he lost them was a sneaky way out.

Grabbing one of the pencils from the box, Harry opened and activated his journal. He was surprised to find all four of his friends on. He'd expected one or two, not all of them.

Daphne: Harry!

Harry: Hey Daphne.

Tracey: Hi Harry. Oh, by the way, if you want to say something like that you're laughing, put stars around it and we'll know that you mean you're doing it.

Harry: Huh?

Theo: *Laughs* Like that, Harry. By the way, I really was laughing.

Harry: Oh... And shut up, Theo.

Theo: Try and make me.

Blaise: *Rolls eyes* It hasn't even been ten minutes and you two are arguing already.

Tracey: Blaise, you know they do it because it's their way of saying they're bored and need something new to do.

Blaise: Yeah, I know, but even you have to admit it's kind of sad.

Daphne: I don't think she was denying it. She was just being herself and explaining why they're doing it.

Harry: Can you three just shut up?

Theo: Yeah, it's sort of insulting to have you three talking about us like this.

Harry was about to write something else when he heard his uncle yell up the stairs, "BOY!"

Harry: Uh... guys? I've gotta go. My uncle is calling me, and he's not in a good mood right now.

With that, Harry closed his journal with the pencil inside, shrunk it, put it back in his pocket, and hurried down the stairs.

"Yes, Uncle Vernon?" he asked the moment he got within his uncle's vision but was still too far away to actually touch.

"You have dinner to cook, Boy, so get to it," his uncle ordered before going back into the living room to watch the Tele.

Sighing, Harry went into the kitchen and began making dinner for the Dursleys. He'd probably get a small piece of it and the rest would go to mainly Dudley. It was sad, yes, but it was also how the Dursleys did things, so Harry put up with it and just went with the flow.

...

Daphne: Something is going on at that house.

Tracey: You're right, Daphne, there is. Harry's never acted like this before.

Theo: How do we prove it? Harry won't tell us anything, especially not after that slip last week.

Blaise: We sneak it out of him, or figure it out from the little things he says.

Daphne: Like how his uncle was mad today?

Blaise: Exactly like that.

Tracey: We'll keep an eye on our friend.

Theo: Of course.

...

That night, Harry went to bed without getting back to his friends in the journal. While they were slightly upset, they understood and just let him sleep instead of using the function that let them heat up his journal so that he'd get up.

Just let me know what you think of the chapter. I'm looking forward to some of the comments on this chapter because I know they'll be there, especially with the Draco thing. :)

Posted: 12/5/10

Chapter Ten

Harry: Why am I not on much in the day? Oh, I help out around the house, go out on walks, go to town, and hang out with Dudley, that's all.

...

Harry: Dudley invited me to hang out with his friends all day, that's all.

...

Harry: Nothing's wrong, you guys. I'm just really busy.

Tracey: How's your homework coming, then? I need some help on the Charms paper.

Harry: Huh? Oh, I've been too busy. You know, hanging out with Dudley and the family. I'll get around to the work later. I've gotta go. Talk to you all another time.

Daphne: I'm worried about him.

Tracey: Yeah, he never doesn't do homework... He's always making Theo and Blaise do theirs during the year.

Daphne: I think we've got a problem on our hands. His homework is always done when we ask during school; we get the most help from him.

Tracey: Well, that's another thing to add to the list...

...

All: Happy Birthday, Harry!

Harry: Huh? Oh, thanks you guys.

Theo: Having a good one?

Harry: Uh... Yeah. I've gotta go; Uncle Vernon is calling me.

Daphne: I'm really worried about him now. It's like he forgot it was his birthday. Even if he didn't, which I don't think he did, he wasn't expecting that from us.

Blaise: Did you see how he hesitated before saying he's been having a good one?

Theo: Yeah. I was about to comment on it as well.

Tracey: Something fishy is going on with him. We've got to drag it out of him this year if not before school starts.

Daphne: Yeah. Any luck getting him to agree to come over, Trace?

Tracey: My dad said he could, but Harry turns the offer down every time. It's like he's afraid to even ask. Keeps saying things like he's busy with his family and helping around the house.

Blaise: Keep trying, please.

Tracey: I will.

...

Harry headed outside after doing the breakfast dishes to enjoy the sun as well as the peace and quiet while it lasted. He hated lying to his friends, which was what he had done just before his uncle had called him downstairs to make breakfast for his family. His birthday meant a nightmare for him; this year this uncle was having an important dinner, and he had to pretend not to exist the entire time.

Harry snorted lightly as he thought about having not to exist, something he'd had to do for most of his life to escape punishments. At least now he had something to do thanks to his journal. He was planning to talk with his friends the entire time. Not even he was blind enough not to see that his friends were trying to pry information about his relatives from him.

Suddenly, Harry saw two tennis ball eyes looking out at him from the bushes. Startled, he blinked and looked back to see nothing there, but he knew that it was something. Being a wizard meant anything was possible, including something looking at him from the bushes. Instead of moving, though, he put the information into his mind to

ask his friends about before going back to his thoughts, only to be interrupted again by his cousin, Dudley, coming over.

"I know what day it is," he sang as he walked – no, waddled – over.

"You mean you've learned the days of the week well enough to know that it's Friday?" Harry retorted as he turned to face his whale of a cousin.

"I mean it's your birthday," Dudley sneered once he had let that statement run through his mind for a moment. "No friends writing to you? Do you even have friends?"

"How do you know they haven't written me?" Harry asked, a smirk on his face as Dudley suddenly became unsure of himself.

Dudley turned away as he had been doing all summer. It had been a huge surprise to his cousin that Harry suddenly wasn't as easy to pick on anymore. After being in Slytherin for ten months, Harry had picked up on a lot of sarcasm, cheek, and quick wit – a lot more than his cousin had. Suddenly, Harry was the one winning all arguments between the two, and Dudley was leaving him alone more and more. Harry went back to relaxing after that.

"BOY!"

Harry sighed as his uncle's voice broke through the silence that had fallen out in the backyard for a few hours after Dudley had left him alone. It was just getting dark, which meant it was time for dinner and then a night of silence. Standing up quickly, he made his way into the kitchen, being careful to walk on the newspaper as his aunt yelled at him to.

Eating the two slices of bread and the lump of cheese quickly, Harry made his way into his room just as the doorbell rang, ignoring his uncle's reminder to be silent. His journal was out of his hand and growing before he was even done closing his door.

He activated it, pulled out a pencil, held it to the writing page, and turned around to go fling himself onto his bed when he had to hold in a yell. On his bed was a tiny creature. It was covered in dirt, wearing an unbelievably messy and old pillowcase, and was staring at him with the eyes from that morning.

"Who are you?" Harry asked, his hands not moving from the doorknob or journal. "What are you?"

"Harry Potter!" the creature said in a high-pitched voice. "So long Dobby has been wanting to meet you... so long... It's such an honor to be meeting you."

"I'm sorry, but who are you? What are you?" Harry repeated to the thing that he guessed was named Dobby.

"Dobby, sir. Dobby the house-elf," Dobby said with a gleam in his eyes that Harry didn't understand.

Suddenly, Harry's journal began burning and it startled him enough that he looked down at it instead of at the house-elf. His eyes widened as he saw everything he and Dobby had just said was repeated on it, and his friends were all reading it.

Daphne: Harry, I just heated up your journal. What the bloody hell is going on?

That Daphne had just cursed shocked Harry more than anything else. Daphne never cursed. She was always hitting Theo and Blaise upside the head for doing it.

"I have no idea what's going on here, but I really can't have a house-elf in my room right now, Dobby," Harry said, answering both Daphne and Dobby. "This is a really bad time... My uncle has guests over and..." Harry trailed off.

Tracey: It's obvious Harry can't answer us directly right now, but he's doing it the best he can. Harry, if you can read this, a house-elf is a slave to a family in the wizarding world, usually rich and old ones like the Malfoys. This Dobby could be bad news, so be very careful.

Harry took Tracey's words into account from the corner of his eye as he watched Dobby rock back and forth on the balls of his feet, looking at Harry with a little fear.

"Harry Potter, sir, Dobby has come to warn you, but he wonders where to begin..." Dobby squeaked.

"Why not from the beginning?" Harry suggested, not knowing where the elf should begin either.

"Harry Potter, sir, you must not go back to Hogwarts," Dobby said suddenly, shocking Harry to his core.

"I have to go back to Hogwarts!" he almost yelled, but then remembered about his uncle so he just said it forcefully. "It's where my friends are, and it's my home! I can't stay here."

Theo: Something odd is going on here...

"Harry Potter, sir, there is a plot, an evil plot. It's going to happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Terrible things are to be happening at Hogwarts this year. You must not go back. You are to be in danger if you do." The elf looked very scared.

"Plot? What plot? What's going to happen? Who's doing it?"

"Dobby cannot say, sir. Please, you must be promising not to go back!"

"I have to go back! Term starts in September and my friends will be worried if I don't go!" Harry exclaimed, knowing that four of his friends were all reading what was somehow appearing in the journals without him writing it like there was nothing more important in the world.

"Friends who don't even write to Harry Potter, sir?" Dobby asked. Harry looked at Dobby confused before he realized that except for his four friends writing in the journals, he hadn't had a single piece of writing from any of his numerous friends.

"How do you know about that?" Harry asked sharply, ignoring the fact that Daphne had just written a message.

"Harry Potter must not be angry with Dobby. He was only acting for Harry Potter's own good," Dobby said while walking back a bit as Harry took a step closer to him.

"Have you been stopping my mail? Under whose orders? Your master's?"

"No, sir. Dobby's master doesn't know he is being here. Dobby will have to put his ears in the oven for being here." Harry looked startled at that because, from what Tracey had said, he had gathered house-elves had to follow orders like slaves.

"Have you been stopping my mail, though?" Harry repeated, putting that information away until later.

Dobby slowly pulled out a bundle of letters, some from each of his friends except the ones talking through the journals and Draco. "Harry Potter, please don't be mad. Dobby is just doing this for Harry Potter's own good."

"Give me those letters, Dobby," Harry said through his teeth.

"Harry Potter must promise not to go back to Hogwarts," Dobby stated, keeping the letters out of Harry's reach.

"I have to go back to Hogwarts, Dobby," Harry said. "It's my home." Harry knew that statement would cause him problems in the long run from his friends, but he had to say it to try and get the letters.

"Then Dobby is being sorry, Harry Potter. Dobby must do this for Harry Potter's own good." With that, Dobby ran between Harry's legs, opened the door, and ran out of the room.

Harry quickly glanced down at his journal, which was burning in his hand.

Daphne: DO NOT FOLLOW HIM! He's going to try and get you in trouble so you can't go back to school!

Tracey: We'll tell the others a house-elf was stopping your mail. Don't bother with the letters, Harry.

Theo: Yeah, I mean, you've been talking with us all summer.

Blaise: Ignore the elf; stay in your room.

"Sorry, guys, but I can't let that elf do anything downstairs. I don't care about the letters that much; it's my uncle's wrath if something goes wrong with this dinner that I'm afraid of." With that, Harry ran out of the room, his journal shrunken but still open in his hand so

that the four could still read what was being said around him, not that Harry realized they could.

Harry found Dobby in the hallway outside of the kitchen, a finger pointed into the kitchen. Following the finger, Harry's gaze found Aunt Petunia's pudding floating in midair.

"No, Dobby, don't!" Harry hissed at the elf, knowing that if it fell, he'd be blamed even if he was in his room.

"Harry Potter must say he is not going back to Hogwarts," Dobby repeated quietly. "It is the only way."

"I can't!" Harry hissed, his heart falling as he realized he was about to get it good. "Hogwarts is my home."

"Then Dobby must do this, for Harry Potter's own good." With that, Dobby's index finger flicked down to the ground before he snapped his fingers and disappeared with a crack. The pudding fell to the ground with a loud crash, and his aunt, his uncle, his cousin, and his uncle's two guests all came running into the room.

His uncle made up an excuse about why Harry had been in his room while his aunt got out ice cream and made Harry clean up the mess. Harry's journal was still open and in his hand, but he knew that putting it into his pocket while his uncle could see him would give it away, so he kept it in his hand the entire time he was cleaning.

Sadly, an owl came with a letter that Harry was forced to read aloud after the Masons, the guests of his uncle that he was trying to get a deal off of, had left. It informed him, and in turn his family, that he wasn't allowed to use magic outside of school. Harry knew he was in trouble when his uncle grinned an evil grin before locking Harry in his room.

"You're never going back, Boy," his uncle snarled through the door. "You're staying in this room forever."

With that, Harry heard his uncle putting bolts and locks onto his door and watched as a cat flap was put at the bottom of his door. Harry knew it was for meals without even asking. Uncle Vernon talked on the phone quite loudly as he ordered metal bars to be put onto Harry's windows the next day.

Harry finally fell onto his bed, shrunken journal still in his hand somehow, and tried to tune his angry uncle out. It was very hard until his journal started burning in his hand, and he un-shrunk it to find an open and active journal in his hand with very worried friends still on.

Daphne: Harry, what was that?

Tracey: No more games, Harry. We know something is going on at that house, and you're telling us what!

Harry sighed before taking the pencil and beginning to reply, not in the mood to try and figure out what had happened earlier with Dobby and the words turning up in the journal.

Harry: What part are you talking about?

Blaise: Your uncle, Harry. What was going on with that? Locked in your room? Never going back?

Harry: The Dursleys... They don't like magic. I told you the first day of school I didn't like the Muggles I live with, and I really don't. I was never told I was a wizard even though they both knew; they were hoping to force it out of me.

Theo: Force what out of you?

Tracey: And how?

Harry: The magic in me. They wanted it out. I wasn't lying when I said I was doing chores around the house; I was lying when I said I was going into town and on walks.

Blaise: And those times you "hung out" with your cousin?

Harry: He and his friends were chasing me around... Trying to catch me so that they could play an old game.

Daphne: The name of this game?

Harry: You don't want to know it, trust me.

Tracey: Harry, we're your friends. We know that your life must have been hard, now that we've heard your uncle talk to you and call you a freak. He never even used your name! The thing is, without knowing all we can, we can't help you.

Harry: It was called... Harry... Hunting... *Closes eyes tightly*

Tracey: Oh, Harry...

Daphne: Trace, talk to your dad. Try and get him to do it tomorrow.

Harry: Do what?

Tracey: Bring you to my house. I've been talking to him about going to your home and dragging you over here. We've all been really worried. Now we know you can't stay there.

Harry: You would have really done that?

Theo: Any of us would, but Tracey's place is the best place for you to stay, so all of us have been talking to him whenever we're there. He's agreed to it, just hasn't wanted to go.

Harry: Thank you.

Daphne: It's no problem. Now, sleep. We'll try and get you out of there tomorrow.

Harry: Night, then.

Harry signed off properly this time, and hid his shrunken journal under his pillow before changing into some of Dudley's old pajamas, the only thing his aunt and uncle would let him wear as everything else was in his trunk under the stairs. He was fast asleep before his head even hit the pillow, his emotions having run wild that evening.

Tracey: My dad said he'll go first thing in the morning. He's even going to one-up it.

Blaise: How?

Tracey: Told me to keep it a secret. You'll know when Harry knows. Just trust me when I say you'll all love it, though no one will love it more than Harry. His life is about to change for the better.

...

Harry woke up the next morning to someone shaking him awake. He closed his eyes tighter and tried to roll over, but the person was obviously expecting it as the hand just held him in place. Groaning, he finally opened his eyes and blinked three times before sitting up to face Tracey, who was fully dressed and standing in his room at the Dursleys.

"Tracey?" he asked in disbelief.

"Yup," she replied with a soft smile. "My dad is downstairs, yelling at your uncle for the locks on your door, the cat flap, the mess of your room, the clothes you're wearing, and basically everything I told him about last night on top of anything else he can find. He's furious about what we're seeing here."

Harry looked down at his legs in embarrassment and shame until Tracey forced his head up so that he was looking at her in the eyes.

"Don't be ashamed of this, Harry. Your relatives are the ones who should be ashamed. You're sleeping in a tiny room full of broken junk that obviously belonged to your cousin as much as the clothes you're wearing. We don't even see your school stuff in here."

"It's locked up under the stairs," Harry muttered as he grabbed his glasses from his bedside table and stood up to go downstairs with Tracey.

When they got down there, they were met with a sight. The man standing just inside the door was obviously Tracey's father. Both had blue eyes and blond hair going on dirty-blond.

Her father was glaring at Harry's uncle, who was cowering in fear while his gaze was fixed on Mr. Davis' wand, which was pointed right at Uncle Vernon. It was obvious that Mr. Davis was done yelling at his uncle, but Harry was still cautious as he stepped off the final step of the stairs and stood waiting.

"Daddy," Tracey said as she stood next to Harry and got her father's attention, "Harry's up and says his school things are locked in that cupboard under the stairs there. Can we get them out so that he can change?"

"Of course, dear," her father replied as he waved his wand at the cupboard that had been Harry's home from the time he had been placed at the Dursleys as the age of one until he was eleven.

Harry quickly grabbed his trunk, and with Tracey's help, brought it back upstairs. He was careful to stay just out of reach of his uncle, who had switched his gaze from the wand to Harry. None of the magic-users in the house were unaware of the glare burning into Harry's head like a bullet.

When the trunk was in his room, Harry opened it and was relieved to find that the charm that allowed only him to open the trunk that he had put on it had obviously worked as nothing was touched.

Tracey quickly went through his clothes and pulled out some muggle clothes as well as one of the black cloaks from his school uniform. Looking at her quickly, Harry realized that Tracey had on a cloak over her clothes, just as her father had, now that Harry thought about it. He smiled at her in thanks before she went out into the hall to wait for him while he changed.

Once in his clothes that actually fit, he stuffed all the clothes that had once belonged to Dudley into the broken wardrobe in the room. Then, he grabbed his wand and put it in his pocket along with his journal, which he grabbed from under his pillow. The rest of the pencils, along with another ten boxes he had managed to find in his room and Dudley's while cleaning, were added to his trunk before he got Tracey again.

He lifted one side of his trunk with one hand while the other carried Hedwig, who was still padlocked in her cage and would have to be let out before too long. Tracey got the other end and, together, they both brought his stuff back downstairs. Mr. Davis unlocked Hedwig's cage so that Harry could let her out. He then shrunk both Harry's trunk and the cage for Harry to put in his pocket.

"You will never be seeing this boy again," he snarled at Uncle Vernon. "You and your wife are terrible guardians and should be

ashamed of yourselves! You were asked to raise the boy like your own, I'm guessing, and instead it looks like you treated him like garbage! It's obvious he used to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs, he wears castoffs of your own whale of a son, he does all the chores and most of the cooking, and he's barely fed!"

Harry gaped at Mr. Davis as he said these things. He flushed in shame when his cupboard was mentioned, and Tracey looked at him in shock and sorrow. If there was one part of his past he did not want getting out, it was that he had lived in that cupboard for ten years of his life. Embarrassment covered all of his features as he listened to his uncle getting told off.

"Come Tracey, Harry," Mr. Davis said as he turned to leave the house. "We've got other places to be and better people to be with."

Harry followed the two from Privet Drive, getting into the car that was sitting in the driveway with Tracey. Mr. Davis drove for a while before anything was said, and it was Harry who spoke, the things said before finally clicking in his mind.

"I don't ever have to go back?" Harry's voice was a mix of shock, hope, amazement, and disbelief.

"No, Harry, you don't," Tracey said from beside him. "Daddy is going to very quietly take the case of your guardianship to the Ministry, and try to make it so that my parents are your guardians instead of the Dursleys."

Harry stared at her, gob smacked. Then, his face slowly transformed to one of extreme happiness, joy, and amazement, as if he couldn't believe his ears. A smile slowly grew on his face until Tracey was seeing a smile on his face like none she had ever seen before; none of his smiles had that much happiness and joy behind them, nor had they ever been that large. It was like the idea of going back to the Dursleys had always been at the back of his mind and holding him back at least a little.

"Thank you," Harry said quietly, though both Tracey and her father heard him. Those two words showed all of the emotions he was feeling and meant more to both of them than anything else Harry could have done.

Almost forgot it was Sunday, truth be told. I'm blaming the 7 hour rehearsal for the American Sign Language show I had yesterday... Threw me off seeing as I was actually at school for it. Well, that and the fact that I've now written three chapters since the weekend started, including the longest one of the series so far.

Anyway, I hope those of you hoping for Harry's friends to figure out about the Dursleys liked this chapter.

Please review, and I hope you enjoyed the chapter. :)

Posted: 12/12/10

Chapter Eleven

Harry stared in shock at the house he had just gotten a tour of. While Tracey's father was Muggle-born, it was obvious that her mother came from at least a moderately wealthy Pureblood family.

The house was three stories and had to have at least ten bedrooms alone, all on the second floor. There was a huge library that took up a good portion of the third floor, with the rest of it being taken up by an indoor pool. The first floor had a living room with three long couches and a bunch of armchairs, a large dining room, and a nice kitchen. The grounds outside were extensive and there was even a pond large enough and deep enough to swim in during the summer.

Just looking at it all had Harry falling in love with the place. He couldn't believe that this might actually be living here during the summers on top of the rest of this one.

When they had first gotten there, Tracey's mother had been waiting at the front door with a kind smile on her face. Tracey had her facial features while she had her father's coloring. Once he had been formally introduced, she had hugged him before going into the kitchen to see about helping the house-elves make a meal for breakfast as Tracey and her father had left very early.

Tracey had then taken him on a tour of the house and told him about her family's history, which she hadn't told him much of at school.

Her mother was from a neutral Pureblood family that had money and land, but not as much as the older Pureblood families like the Malfoys and Blacks. Mr. Davis was a Muggle-born from Wales who had fallen in love with her mother and gotten permission to marry her from Tracey's grandfather after being accepted into the Auror Corps. Both had been neutral while Voldemort was alive, but even then they had felt more towards the light side and away from Voldemort's ideals.

What most didn't understand about her family was that it was neutral because it understood both light and dark magic and how the so-called dark magic wasn't really dark unless you had bad intentions except for a few spells. Because of this, they stayed neutral in the war and didn't join in on the fighting.

It turned out that the fact they seemed more light than dark was the reason Tracey's house was the best place for Harry to stay. The fact that her father was Muggle-born and Tracey a Half-blood only helped.

...

"That was delicious," Harry said with a smile as he put his fork down next to his empty plate. "Thank you."

"It was nothing, Harry," Mrs. Davis said with a smile of her own as she raised her fork with a bite of pancake on it.

"Harry, do you want me to show you which room will be yours?" Tracey asked once she finished her milk off.

"Sure."

Both of them left the table once given permission by her parents and rushed upstairs. Tracey took Harry to a room next to the one she had said was her own, though she didn't let him in, saying that she'd show him later on.

When they entered, Harry was shocked. The room was an emerald green color with silver carpet, the colors of Slytherin. The bed reminded him of the one back in his dorm at Hogwarts because both were mahogany; his trunk was open at the end of it. In a way, this room was mimicking his dorm because he also had a desk, chair, and wardrobe made of mahogany. A bathroom was off the side.

Something he hadn't been expecting was the stand by the open window, which was where Hedwig was asleep with her head under her wing. Her cage was on the ground next to it.

A small smile came to his face at the sight of his owl sleeping there peacefully.

"So, do you like it?" Tracey asked him after a few minutes of allowing him to look around.

"I love it," he replied, turning to face her with a growing smile.

"When we all got my father to agree to let you come over a couple of weeks ago, my parents asked what we should make your room look like. All of us talked about it for two days before coming up with this. We all knew that you'd love it." Harry was smiling by then, amazed by the kindness of both his friends and her family.

"Daphne's room is on the other side of mine with the boys on the other side of the hall," Tracey continued. "We've all be close friends for years, so we all have a room at each other's homes. At first, we slept in two rooms, but then we all got our own when we turned nine."

"Wow," Harry said quietly. All of this was amazing him beyond belief. He had grown up in a home without being loved, and now he had amazing friends who were doing so much for him.

Suddenly, both of them winced and their hands flew to their pockets. They caught each others eyes and began laughing quietly as they opened their journals.

"Daphne," they said in the same breath, which just made them laugh even harder as they activated the journals.

Tracey went over to Harry's desk to get them quills, but Harry grabbed her arm to stop her. He went to his trunk and pulled out a second pencil, which he passed to her before picking his own up from inside the journal.

"It's a muggle thing," he explained to answer the question in her eyes. "No ink needed. You just write." Her eyes widened as she realized how much easier this would be, and then she began writing, as did Harry.

Both: Yes, Daphne? They both knew that would annoy her as they constantly spoke in unison. The trait had continued on in the journals.

Daphne: I hate it when you both do that, you know.

Both: Yup, we know.

Daphne: Argh! Stop!

Both: Why?

Daphne: Anyway... How'd it go?

Harry: Her house is so awesome! Both had caught the other's eye and agreed silently to just give it up.

Daphne: So they got you?

Harry: Yup! Tracey came up to my room and woke me up.

Tracey: Dad went up with me, got his room unlocked, took one look at the room and Harry, and went down to yell at his uncle. I'm surprised the yelling didn't wake Harry up. Theo and Blaise were always saying Harry's a light sleeper and wakes up early.

Harry: Uh... Yelling men isn't something I'm not unused to... It normally wakes me up, but I was exhausted from Dobby last night.

After reading that, Tracey got up from her place at Harry's desk and joined him on his bed. She hugged him tightly, and was happy when he hugged her back after stiffening for a moment.

Daphne: I'm going to guess that Tracey is hugging you right now, Harry, so I won't bother saying anything on top of that. I'd be doing the same thing if I were there, too.

No one spoke on the journal for a good ten minutes, which was when Theo and Blaise, who were both staying at Blaise's house for the night, got on to talk.

Theo: Hey, what's going on here?

Blaise: Yeah, how did the rescue of Harry go?

Harry: I'm at Tracey's. Nice place. Both had let go when the two boys had joined the conversation, but Tracey stayed on the bed with her journal and pencil.

Tracey: Ha! You should have seen his face. He was amazed beyond belief.

Harry: Oh, shut up, Tracey. In his room, Harry poked Tracey in the side, making her squeal with laughter as he had hit a very ticklish spot on her. Her pencil was on her journal as she had just been about to retort when he did that.

Tracey: *Squeals with laughter*

Harry and Tracey stared down at their journals in disbelief. Both knew that Tracey had not written that. Now that they were thinking about it, Harry hadn't written anything at all last night until after the whole Dobby incident. Both silently came to an agreement.

Both: Guys, we'll be back. We have to ask someone something.

Both of them signed off without waiting for a response and ran out of Harry's room to the living room, journals in hand. When they got there, they were both relieved to find her father sitting at one of the desks Harry had missed the first time he had been in here. He was writing something with a quill, but turned around to face them when both children ran into the room.

"Yes, children?" he asked, curious as to the great rush.

"Dad, did you charm the journals so that if we talk, the words or actions will appear as if we had written them?" Tracey asked in a great rush.

"And if someone else speaks while in the area of them, can their words also appear?" Harry added, having just thought of how that had happened with Dobby and his relatives.

"The answer is yes to both," Mr. Davis said as he moved to a couch and motioned for them to sit on one opposite it. "If a quill, or whatever you're writing with," he added as he saw a pencil sticking out of Harry's journal, "is touching the rightmost parchment, anything said by an owner of a journal, a magical creature, or a relative in any form of an owner will appear in the journal as if written.

"The catch is that only owners of a journal have their own handwriting and name appear when they speak. If it's a relative or a creature like a centaur or house-elf, the handwriting is like that from a computer and the name says other." When he finished, he watched as both children absorbed it all.

"Does that mean we can let others write in our journals until we give them their own?" Harry asked slowly.

"Yes, but it will be their handwriting under the name of the owner, so you'll be able to tell who's journal it is as well as that it isn't the owner."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Tracey demanded after taking that bit of information in as well.

"Where's the fun in telling you all that you can do with these things?" her father retorted with a smile on his face that proved he had definitely belonged to Slytherin when he was in school.

"Does that mean..." Harry started with a frown on his face as he fought to figure out how to turn his thoughts into words. "Does that mean we might find more features to them, or maybe add our own in the future?" Harry was speaking slowly, his ideas still forming in his mind.

"Oh, I expect to get letters home from Tracey telling me about the new feature you've all found at least once a term," her father said with a smile. "It also won't surprise me if you all either ask me for extra things or find others to put them onto the journals at random times. I'd be very disappointed if you didn't use these to their full extent."

Harry and Tracey shared a smile as they realized they now had something extra to do during school as well as for the rest of break.

"Thanks Daddy!" Tracey called as they both jumped to their feet and ran down the hall to Harry's room.

Once they were seated, they both hurried on again to explain to their friends what they had both just found out. The five friends then spent the rest of the morning testing out the talking feature, not even noticing the time flying until parents began calling for kids to go downstairs for lunch.

After lunch, Tracey had her dad add a charm to her and Harry's journals so that a pencil, quill, or pen could be held at the top right corner of the page for five seconds and then let go with the writing

tool staying in place so that they wouldn't have to hold it there to use the talking feature. He also added a holder to the journal so that two pencils could be kept in the folds of the journal, one in each.

Once that was done, Tracey set up the journal so that they would use hers to talk into. Harry set his own up so that it was leaning against the desk at an angle so that he only had to look up to be able to read it.

The rest of the afternoon was spent with Harry doing homework and talking with his friends while Tracey just plain spoke to them as her homework was done. None of Harry's friends commented on how the Dursleys had locked up his school stuff so he couldn't do homework or touch any of his things.

That evening, Harry was surprised when the four friends came over. It wasn't until they all were wishing Tracey a Happy Birthday that he realized her birthday was the day after his. Harry wished her a Happy Birthday, wishing that he could have gotten her something, though he knew she understood.

When Tracey saw him upset about not getting her something, she took him aside and told him that just being able to have him there on her birthday was a gift. Harry felt better after that and was able to enjoy the dinner with his friends. All five of them joked around and acted as if they had seen each other just the day before, sort of like school had never ended. It was sad to see the three off, but they left, all five friends smiling.

Both of them went to bed happy that night.

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The next week was spent in a similar way, though the schedule changed. After breakfast, they'd go to Harry's room so that they could let Harry do homework while they both chatted to at least one of the three friends, though usually all three were on. After lunch, Harry and Tracey would go for a swim in the pond or go for a fly around the house. At night, before bed but after dinner, they'd move to the library to find books to read and read until bed.

Then, something new happened.

"Harry," Mr. Davis said as Harry took another bite of pancake and then turned to face him. "You, Tracey, and I are going to Gringotts. We have to see if we can't take you to the Potter Family Storage Vault to see what's been left in there. You might also be old enough to hear your parents' will now."

Harry stared at Mr. Davis for a full minute with his mouth hanging open and eyes wide before he was able to react. Even that took Tracey poking him in the ribs to get him to do. Harry turned to glare at Tracey because her poke had hurt.

"Their – their will?" he then stuttered out as he turned to face Mr. Davis again.

"Of course, Harry. They'd have had a will, but there's always an age where a person is old enough to hear it if the main benefactor is very young. It's not uncommon for the age to be eleven. You don't have to have it told to you, though; you can choose to get a copy of the will to hold on to."

"Oh..." Harry thought about that for a bit before turning back to another question. "Potter Family Storage Vault?"

"You haven't been to it?" Mr. Davis asked, quite surprised when Harry shook his head. "Why, it's the Potter vault that's full of books, weapons, jewelry, maybe some furniture, and probably the most likely place for a letter from your parents to be."

Harry's mouth fell open again as he realized he might actually be able to read a letter written to him from one of his own parents. This time, Tracey didn't poke him as she and her parents could all see the tears coming to Harry's eyes before his blinking wiped them away. They hadn't realized how much this would mean to him, but once they thought about it, they realized that it would most likely mean the world to this poor boy in front of them.

"We'll be going after lunch," Mr. Davis told Harry as the boy got up from the table to go to his room to think. Only Harry's nod told the family that he had heard.

Tracey gave Harry a minute to get to his room before following. When she got there, Harry was sitting on his bed, staring at the wall, completely still. Walking over to sit near him, she didn't say anything

as she saw the silent tears running down his cheeks. Instead, she waited for him, only putting a hand on his shoulder to tell him she was there for him.

After a minute or so, Harry turned to his friend and she pulled him into her arms as he continued to cry silently. She could tell that he had never cried for his parents before; he was finally letting out the grief of growing up without his parents.

Harry knew he was crying on his friend, but he also knew that she got what was going on inside of him. The two of them just knew each other; it was like they had grown up together. They were as close as siblings, and it showed. Their friends had grown to think of them as the siblings that had grown up apart; they certainly acted like it.

When Harry finally stopped crying, the grief was gone, and they both knew he could and would move on from all of this. His life had been hard, they both knew it, but he was finally away from his past and he would grow from it. Once he went to Gringotts and found out what was there for him, he would be ready. Whatever they found there would only help him, not hurt him.

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"We'd like to see someone about Mr. Potter's Storage Vault as well as his parents' will," Mr. Davis told the goblin teller at Gringotts.

The goblin looked Harry over, found his scar, nodded, and called a goblin over to show them to a private room so that another goblin could help them with what they needed.

"Well, what can Gringotts do for Mr. Potter?" the goblin, Blacktooth, asked as he entered the room where the three were sitting.

"We'd like to know if he could have a copy of his parents' will," Mr. Davis told the goblin without hesitation.

"Yes, he can," Blacktooth replied without even checking. "We were hoping he'd come in last summer, but he never asked about it when he was here on his birthday."

"Wait! I could have gotten it last year?" Harry had sat up straight and looked a bit angry.

"Yes, Mr. Potter," Blacktooth said calmly, though he was a bit surprised the boy hadn't known. "Headmaster Dumbledore was informed many years ago and then reminded before we sent you a letter that you were to come and see us about it once you were eleven."

Many things flew through Harry's mind at that, but only one thing came out of his mouth. "You sent me a letter?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter," was the answer. "We sent it exactly a week before your eleventh birthday to inform you that you could come and claim the will on your birthday."

"It seems Dobby isn't the only one stealing letters from me," Harry said to Tracey as they shared a look.

"You never received our letter?" Blacktooth asked, a bit surprised.

"No. Before my Hogwarts letters, I never received a single letter." Harry thought for a moment before moving on. "Why did you tell Professor Dumbledore?"

"Because when Sirius Black, your chosen guardian and Godfather, was found unacceptable as your guardian, Professor Dumbledore received the okay to be your magical guardian. Were you not informed of this either?"

"Not at all." Harry and Tracey shared a long look that held an entire conversation in seconds. "A lot was kept from me it seems."

"Well, can he have the will now, please?" Mr. Davis asked politely after a minute of tense silence. The entire silence had Tracey and Harry talking silently, both showing their anger at Dumbledore that had been nonexistent before that meeting.

"Oh yes, I even have a copy with me," Blacktooth said as he pulled out a sealed scroll and handed it to Harry, who put it into the pouch on his belt that shrunk anything put into it, not wanting to look at it yet. "Is there anything else?"

"We'd like to go to the Potter Storage Vault, if we could," Harry said before Mr. Davis could speak for him again.

"Of course, Mr. Potter," Blacktooth said with a nod. "I'll get someone to take you down there. Would you like to go to your trust vault as well to pick up some money?"

"Yes please," Harry said, knowing the money bag on his belt was almost empty.

"Very well." Blacktooth went to the hall and came back in with Griphook, the goblin who had taken Harry to his vault last summer. "Griphook will escort you."

After a very long cart ride that had both Harry and Tracey smiling, Harry quickly filled up his money pouch with galleons before they headed off even deeper into the ground towards the Storage Vault. When they finally stopped again, Harry was a bit nervous, but he also knew he had to go in there.

Griphook opened the vault for them the same way he had opened the vault for the Philosopher's Stone, by running his nail down the middle of the door. Then, he told them he'd wait outside for them.

Harry entered the vault and stared. Around him was a vault filled with bookshelves full of books, jewelry boxes, a bunch of jewelry, racks of weapons ranging from bows to swords to shields, and in the middle was a simple wooden box. Harry ignored everything around him as he walked up to the box and picked it up.

It had a design on the top he saw, now that he could see it clearly: There was a stag with a lily in the body. Harry closed his eyes for a moment before opening the box to find two letters with his name on them, each in a different handwriting.

Pulling out the one with the more masculine handwriting, Harry sat down on the floor in the middle of the vault, completely oblivious to everything but the box in his hands and the letters inside. He opened the one from his father and began reading, tears slowly making their way down his face as he read something his own father had written.

Harry,

I'm so sorry I couldn't be there to see you grow up, which would be the only reason you're reading this letter. Your mother and I knew Voldemort was coming after us, so we hid. We're about to cast a spell to hide ourselves, but Padfoot, your godfather Sirius Black, is trying to convince us to use Wormtail, Peter Pettigrew is his real name, instead of him to hide the secret. He's always saying, "Prongs, Wormtail won't be expected, I will; he's the perfect choice!" The thing is, I'd rather have my best friend guard my family. The problem? Padfoot has a point. I can't decide which of them to use yet.

Anyway, I know you're going to be an excellent person, no matter who raises you. You and Lily are the loves of my life, and you both mean the world to me. No matter what happens, know that I love you, I've always loved you, and I always will love you.

Before I end this, I've got to say that I know you're going to be an excellent Quidditch player! I took you flying once and all you wanted to do was go faster. You're also always trying to grab the toy snitch I got you. No matter what you do with yourself, I'll always be proud of you.

Love,

Dad

PS: If you're going to Hogwarts, just remember that even though your mother and I were both Gryffindors, it doesn't matter what house you're in, we'll always be proud of you, even if you're a Slytherin.

Harry barely even noticed as Tracey put an arm around his shoulder while he was reading. All he did was pull out the letter from his mother and begin reading it, still ignoring his surroundings.

My Dear Harry,

I love you with all of my heart. If you're reading this, Voldemort found us and we didn't get to watch you grow up. I'm so sorry that this happened. Either way, I just know that you're a good boy and an even greater person. Nothing anyone else says against that is true. I just know you're the best you can be.

You are the main reason I live. James comes second when it comes to you, Harry. You're my little boy, and nothing will ever change that. I love you so much, and there's nothing else I can say. I love you more than anything in the world, and I always will, even in death.

If you're anything like me, you'll make a bunch of friends in school, get good grades, and just enjoy life. The only advice I can give you for Hogwarts is to forget the Houses and be friends with who you choose, not who your House chooses. Otherwise, have fun and enjoy Hogwarts.

Love,

Mum

Finally, when Harry put both of the letters back in the box and the box into the pouch at his side, he noticed Tracey there with him, holding him tightly with one arm as he cried silent tears. Wiping his face, he gave her a shaky smile to tell her he was okay, and she smiled in return as she helped him stand up. With a final squeeze, she let go of him and walked around the vault with him.

Harry saw two tiny boxes, not far from where the box had been, and opened them to find his parents' wedding rings, both somehow still in perfect shape. He pulled them out of the boxes, found a gold chain in the pile of jewelry, and put them around his neck. Both he and Tracey fingered them before he put them under his shirt and moved on.

Grabbing a few bracelets when Tracey wasn't looking, Harry slipped them into his pouch, knowing exactly what a few of his friends were getting for Christmas. Otherwise, Harry mainly looked at the jewelry and moved on.

When Harry got to the books, he slowed down a lot. Finding a bag like the one he used for school on the side of the first shelf, he grabbed it and began filling it with books on Potions, Charms, Transfiguration, DADA, Animagi, Occlumency, Legilimency, Nonverbal Magic, and anything else that looked interesting. He had figured out early on that the bag shrunk the books and made them weightless like his pouch did, though only for books for some reason.

Once he and Tracey had grabbed every book they could possibly want for the school year, they moved onto looking at the weapons. While Mr. Davis did not want them taking any bows or swords out with them, he did agree that they could get a few knives and daggers as they could be easily hidden.

Harry grabbed a few sheathed daggers with emeralds in them before spotting some with rubies and then sapphires. It took him a while, but he finally found a few daggers hidden away with a gemstone that Mr. Davis told him was citrine, which was a yellow stone, in it.

Just before they left, Harry saw a handful of pocketknives, which he took. Tracey spotted something on the wall by the door that made all three of them stop to stare at. There was dragonhide there.

Harry walked up to the wall and ran his fingers over the black dragonhide boots on the shelves. Smiling, he pulled a pair down and replaced his sneakers with them. As all of the shoes were the same size, Harry guessed they would shrink or grow to fit his feet, and he was right.

Turning to Tracey and her father, he pulled down two more pairs and held them out to them. Their eyes widened and they tried to tell him no, but they looked into his eyes and realized this was his way of saying thank you. They pulled them on and smiled as they changed sizes to fit their feet perfectly.

"Grab some for the others?" Tracey asked Harry, knowing that he was trying to decide the same thing.

"I think we should," Harry said before grabbing four more pairs, which confused Tracey and her father.

"Four? Shouldn't it be three?" Tracey asked.

"Draco," was all Harry said in response as it was all the response needed.

"Christmas gifts from you?" Tracey asked as he put them into the pouch.

"From us," he said, which surprised her, but she smiled. "Our idea, so we share the gift, even if neither of us paid for it."

Tracey agreed, so they began to look through the rest of the objects on the shelves. They were about to give up, thinking that the rest was just armor, which neither of them wanted or needed yet, but then they saw something at the end. Smiles came to their faces as they shared glances.

Both were staring at wand holsters of different types of hides, making them different colors. There were a few of each color: red, blue, green, black, gold, bronze, brown, and even a couple of silver.

Harry quickly grabbed all but one of each color, slipping them all into his bag except one green and one gold. He put the green on his own right wrist while Tracey claimed the gold as her own. Both slipped their wands into them before running to show Mr. Davis them and give him his own black one. He thanked Harry profusely, but he just shook his head and snuck another pair of dragonhide boots into his pouch for Tracey's mother before they finally left the vault to go back home.

Much earlier than my normal update, but it's officially Sunday where I live in Eastern USA, and I'm flying to Pennsylvania tomorrow, so I know it's going to be a crazy morning and afternoon once I get to our friends' house. Basically, I'm posting when I'm supposed to like a good little author, even if it's MUCH earlier than normal in the day. :)

Now, I'm just going to say this about the chapter... I'm one of those people who agree that Harry probably has another vault or two in Gringotts that he's just not old enough to collect. The way I see it, he has the Trust Vault and the Storage Vault that he can access, while the Family Vault with the official papers and money and other stuff is off limits until he's of age. Right now, the Storage Vault is a place for all of the furniture, weapons, jewelry, etc, as you saw.

Not the chapter most were looking forward to, but that's NEXT chapter. :) Anyway, review and let me know what you thought. :)

Posted: 12/19/10

Chapter Twelve

Later that evening, back in Harry's room after dinner, Harry was finally getting around to looking at his parents' will. Tracey was in the bathroom, so he was alone for the moment.

Opening the scroll slowly, Harry began reading. Basically, his parents had left him everything. They then said that Sirius Black was to be his guardian, and if not available, they wanted him to go to a light or neutral wizarding family. If he couldn't go to any of those, he was to go to a Muggle family. The only place could not go was the home of Vernon and Petunia Dursley.

When Harry read that, he began shaking with anger. He was so busy being angry, he didn't even notice Tracey coming back into the room. She was frightened by the look on his face and went to get her father, knowing that he'd be able to help more than her as Tracey had recognized the scroll in Harry's hands as the will.

"Harry? What is it? What did you find in there?" her father asked, finally breaking through Harry's mind enough that he looked up and saw them both sitting on either side of him.

"My parents said to send me anywhere but to the Dursleys," Harry managed to get out between his gritted teeth.

Tracey put her arm around Harry like she had in the vault earlier while her father slowly pulled the parchment from his grasp, being very careful not to rip it. While Tracey helped Harry calm down, Mr. Davis read through the will, being very careful to read over the guardian section with the utmost care.

Though he did not wish to tell Harry this, the fact that his parents hadn't wanted him to go to his uncle's home meant there was even more of a chance to get him away from their guardianship. Even better was the fact that they wanted him to go to a light or neutral wizarding family if he couldn't go to Sirius Black. Since he couldn't go to his godfather, the Davis family had a good chance of getting Harry as long as Harry was willing to stay, which had been proven by the past week.

Mr. Davis smiled internally as he thought about the trial occurring in three days time: The Guardianship of one Mr. Harry James Potter.

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Harry sat between Tracey and Mr. Davis with Mrs. Davis on her husband's other side at the bench in Courtroom Six. They were going to have a closed session with only ten people deciding with another ruling. It turned out that someone was deeply opposed to his switching guardians, so they were going to fight it out. No matter what the outcome, none of it was to reach the press or there would be trouble.

Watching as Professor Dumbledore figuratively handed off the power of ruling the session, Harry was only mildly surprised to see him walk over to the other table facing those deciding.

"This is a case of the guardianship of Mr. Harry James Potter," the woman, who Tracey had whispered was Madam Amelia Bones, Susan's aunt, said as she looked down at Harry. "Headmaster Albus Dumbledore is against the change while Mr. Samuel Davis wishes to take over the guardianship.

"Professor Dumbledore, please begin." Dumbledore stood up and began what must have been a long-prepared speech.

"I personally believe that this is all just a misunderstanding. When I heard about this whole trial, I went to the Dursley home and spoke with Mrs. Dursley. She told me that Harry is treated very well there and always has been; he loves it there." One look at Harry's face said otherwise, but Professor Dumbledore didn't pay attention to it, though everyone else did.

"From what she said, Harry has always been fed three large meals a day with seconds and thirds when he wants." Everyone saw that Harry was ridiculously thin, which contradicted with Dumbledore's words. "He hung out with his cousin and friends a lot, running around outside and having fun."

At those words, Harry had to bite his bottom lip to keep himself from yelling at Dumbledore. Tracey noticed and put her hand on Harry's arm, reminding him that he had friends who cared about him and would help him if he needed it. He visibly relaxed as he stopped biting his lip and listened to Dumbledore.

"Harry's had a very good life with his aunt, uncle, and cousin. They're pretty well off, so he's had his own room, clothes, toys, and anything else he wanted."

When Harry coughed, it sounded like he was saying "Lies." Only Tracey caught it, but it was enough for her to tighten her grip on Harry's forearm.

"It is my belief that Harry has had a wonderful life, and that this is a misunderstanding. Mrs. Dursley even said that they gave him permission to visit the Davis family for the next couple of weeks before he goes back." With that, Professor Dumbledore gave the people at the front of the room a nod before sitting down, a calm look on his face.

"Yes, well, it seems both Mr. Davis and Mr. Potter wish to speak," Madam Bones said after the moment of silence Professor Dumbledore's abrupt finish brought about. "I think we'll have Mr. Davis speak first and Mr. Potter will be last. Mr. Davis?" Tracey's father rose and cleared his throat before beginning.

"I believe I speak for everyone when I say that I couldn't believe it when I heard that Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, was Sorted into Slytherin. The morning of September 2nd, I got a letter from my daughter, Tracey," Mr. Davis looked at Tracey for a moment as he said that, "and the first thing in it after telling me that she was a Slytherin was that the Harry Potter was also a Slytherin.

"Even though I knew that Tracey wouldn't lie about those sorts of things, it wasn't until I got Floo calls from the Zabini's, Notts, and Greengrasses that I believed it. After that day, I learned about Harry through my daughter's letters as well as the stories she told over Christmas Break. The idea I got from both was that he's a smart, kind, unbiased young man that knows when to be serious and when to have fun. He also made friends outside of Slytherin and was among the top in their year. Everything I heard impressed me greatly."

Mr. Davis paused, taking a deep breath as he did. Putting a hand into his robe, Mr. Davis pulled out a scroll as he shared a look with Tracey and got a nod from her that confused Harry just as much as everyone else. Harry didn't recognize the scroll, but he felt that it looked familiar for some reason.

"When Tracey came running up to me on July 31st, Harry's birthday, after dinner, I was worried; her face was scared, worried, and upset all at once. Tracey also had this scroll in her hand, but she didn't even move to give it to me when I first saw her.

"From the very first day of summer, the day they all got off the train, Tracey and her friends were trying to convince me to get Harry over to my home. No matter what I asked, I didn't get any clear explanations. The most I got from them was that Harry had been acting odd since the last day of exams when summer was brought up and the fact that he had to go home finally hit him. It took them until the train ride home to drag it out of him that he didn't want to go home to the Dursleys.

"I was very confused by the fact that he didn't want to go home, so I put the idea to the back of my mind. The details stayed there until Tracey began showing me pieces of what Harry wrote basically every night about two weeks into the break. When Tracey came to me on the 31st and finally gave me this scroll, I was ready to act. This scroll contains a conversation that occurred at the Dursley home on the night of the 31st."

Everyone watched as Harry's eyes widened in realization before he turned to Tracey. They began whispering almost silently with a lot of gesturing. The only things that anyone caught was Harry pointing to one of his pockets over and over and Tracey pretending to hold something in her hand while running her finger over it.

While they were having their conversation, which only Mr. and Mrs. Davis had any idea about what it was about, Mr. Davis used his wand to make a copy of the scroll and presented Madam Bones with the copy before returning to his seat to wait. She, in turn, opened it and read what was written in it.

What amazed those watching Madam Bones the most was the fact that the normally calm Madam Bones was going through emotions so fast that the watchers could barely keep up. Her face went from calm to shock to anger to sorrow and back to anger before she got a grip on her emotions and put on an emotionless mask while finishing the scroll of dialogue.

"Is this all true?" Madam Bones asked in a tired voice once she was done. Everyone looked up to see that she wasn't asking Mr. Davis but Harry.

"Everything," Harry confirmed even though he had never seen the scroll as he knew where it came from and what was on it, "even the part about the elf and the letter."

"I'll see to it that your record is cleaned," Madam Bones said matter-of-factly before she paused, deep in thought. "Where did this come from?"

"What do you mean?" Mr. Davis asked, a bit worried as he knew the kids didn't want their journals known.

"What's the source?" Madam Bones clarified. "This was written by more than one person and had additions to what was said in the Dursley home."

Mr. Davis was trying to come up with a believable answer when he saw Harry and Tracey sharing looks that were obviously a silent conversation between the two that had become as close as twins as they could be after only knowing each other for less than a year. When both of them nodded at once, he released a breath he hadn't even noticed he had been holding as he relaxed into his chair and let them both deal with it.

"Madam Bones," Harry called, "may Tracey and I come up and show you something?"

When a curious Madam Bones nodded her consent, Tracey pulled something out of the bag she had never taken off her shoulder. Harry and Mr. Davis both saw a flash of lavender before her robes covered it, but no one else did as she had moved too fast for them. The two children walked right up to Madam Bones and stood in front of her, blocking her from Dumbledore's view on purpose.

"This is what we used to get the scroll, though we used other ones," Tracey said as she held out a lavender journal to Madam Bones and put it on the table between them.

"Mine is this one," Harry added as he pulled out his shrunken, emerald green journal and made it normal sized.

"What are they?" Madam Bones asked as she picked up the lavender journal. She gasped quietly when she turned it over and saw the name Susan Bones on the back in gold letters.

"They're messenger journals," Tracey explained. "My dad makes them when I ask for more so that I can talk with my friends easier. This is the one we were going to give Susan in September." She was pointing at the lavender journal.

"But our friend Theodore Nott reminded us that you might be here today," Harry continued, "which meant Susan could get it sooner, so we brought it with us."

"So you can write to each other with these?" Madam Bones asked, amazed at the idea of it.

"Among other things," Harry said with a mischievous smile on his face.

"We can make scrolls out of conversations if we do it before we turn off the messenger mode," Tracey elaborated after giving Harry a look that only made a glint appear in his eyes to go along with his smile. "When it's not in messenger mode, we can take notes or do homework in it and make scrolls with it. The writing put while not in messenger mode will stay, but not anything in messenger mode, so I made that scroll right away." Tracey nodded at the scroll still on the table.

"We also learned from that conversation," Harry nodded at the scroll as he mentioned the conversation, "that talking can be transferred to the journal if a writing utensil is touching it, though not all talking can be transferred. That's what happened on my birthday and why the talking from the Dursleys, the house-elf, and my friends are all on the scroll along with my own talking." Tracey nodded in agreement from beside him.

"Very well," Madam Bones said after a bit of thought. "This is a reliable source." Her voice, which had been a bit louder so that all in the room could hear her decision, lowered to a whisper. "I'll make sure Susan gets this after work today." Both children nodded their thanks before returning to their seats.

"Mr. Davis," Madam Bones called, "please continue." Tracey's father stood up again to continue.

"I went to the Dursley home the very next morning. When Tracey and I went upstairs to find Harry as he was still asleep, we found his door with three or four locks on the outside and a cat flap on the bottom for food. Once I got it open, I found a room full of broken, second-hand furniture, toys that were old and mostly all broken that obviously didn't belong to Harry, and a pile of clothes that were obvious old clothes of Harry's cousin on the floor next to his bed as well as on him." By then, most of the people around Madam Bones were muttering, and everyone in the room was upset and furious except for Harry, Tracey, Mr. Davis, and Professor Dumbledore.

"When Tracey had finally woken Harry up, he told us that his school stuff was locked – with a padlock no less! – under the stairs in a closet! He hadn't even touched the trunk and things inside of it all summer."

Harry was feeling very relieved that he had asked Mr. Davis not to tell them that the cupboard under the stairs had been his room for ten years. Everyone was already worked up and outraged, and they only knew about that one summer.

"Tracey and I took Harry home, and he's spent the last ten days with us. Every time I see him he's either smiling or his eyes are shining in happiness, neither of which I saw when I picked him up from his relatives."

Mr. Davis was done and sat down while Madam Bones tried to calm the others down even though she herself was outraged and upset by all of this. Dumbledore was still sitting quietly, though anyone that knew him well enough would be able to tell that he was devastated by what he had heard.

"Mr. Potter," Madam Bones said sadly when everyone was at least quiet again, "it's your turn to speak."

"My life at the Dursleys' hasn't been easy," Harry said calmly as he stood up, "but I've survived it. I never had anywhere to go before Hogwarts. Now I know that I have friends who will take me in if I need it. Even more, I know now that my parents never wanted me at the Dursleys'.

"I used to think that they had wanted me there, but I just saw their will three days ago. It said that if I couldn't go to Sirius Black," Harry paused as he saw people flinching at the name before moving on, "then I was to go to a light or neutral family, which includes at least two of my friends including the Davis family. If I couldn't go to one of those places, I was to go to any Muggle home but the Dursley's."

"Because I now know all of this, I can't think of the Dursley's as home. If I'm forced back there, I'll just run away to someone else's house and never look back. Hogwarts and the Davis' are my homes; the Dursley home will never be home to me again, no matter what you do." Harry's arms had crossed over his chest in defiance as he spoke, and his face was pure determination and defiance.

"Very well, Mr. Potter," Madam Bones said. "We will take all of this into consideration as we discuss it."

Madam Bones then put up a silencing ward so that Harry and the others couldn't hear her and her colleagues, but they could hear those waiting for the verdict.

"Madam Bones," Professor Dumbledore called. She removed the ward and looked at him.

"Yes, Professor Dumbledore?" She was obviously a bit confused.

"I'll personally find and fill out the forms needed to change Mr. Potter's guardians from the Dursleys and myself to the Davises." Everyone shared shocked looks for a moment before staring at Dumbledore, all unable to speak for a moment.

"Why?" Harry demanded, breaking the silence. "Why now? You were against the change an hour ago and now you're suddenly for it? I want a reason." Everyone looked from Harry, who was glaring at the Headmaster, to Dumbledore, who was looking at Harry sadly.

Dumbledore sighed sadly and answered. "The Blood Wards I erected eleven years ago are gone. You no longer see your aunt's house as your home, so they're gone. The Davis home is better protected than your relatives' now. There's no point in denying that the Davis home will be a better environment for you, and now I have no reason to keep you from it."

Harry continued to glare at Dumbledore even as he nodded to let the professor know that he understood what the man was saying. Otherwise, everyone else didn't move as they were all still in shock by what Dumbledore, and then Harry, had said. It took a lot of time for them to all come out of their shock.

"Well, I guess we're done here," Madam Bones finally said. "Mr. Potter will be with the Davises from now on." She gave everyone in the room a hard look right in the eyes. "This trial is not to get out to the public or the papers. This is a private trial for a reason; no one is to find out about this or you will have to deal with both myself and Mr. Potter personally. No one outside of this room can even know it occurred."

Everyone nodded before standing up and talking amongst themselves. Tracey and Harry were sharing smiles while Mr. Davis ruffled Harry's hair affectionately. Mrs. Davis walked around her husband to hug Harry with one arm while the other hand went onto Tracey's shoulder. To the other people in the room, it was obvious that Harry had become a part of this family so much that it was like he was one of their own from the beginning.

As the group of four was about to leave the room, Professor Dumbledore walked up to them to speak to Harry.

"I'm truly sorry about how you grew up, Harry. I had no idea your mother's sister would treat you like that. If I'd had any idea that was happening, you'd have been moved to the next securest place I could find, but I had no idea."

The professor truly did look like he was sorry, but Harry was a bit annoyed by the reason Dumbledore had given in, so he was having a hard time forgiving the man. It took Tracey squeezing his arm and giving him a look that said to calm down before answering for him to take a deep breath and look at what Dumbledore said from all angles.

"You could have done a lot better, Professor," Harry said slowly as he thought carefully about his words, "but everyone makes mistakes. Many things could have been done including checking on me once and a while as well as just not sending me there in the first place, but that's all in the past. Next time, tell me before you act; think it all

through before you just do something. Your actions affect a lot of people, Professor, because of who you are, so make sure you realize all of the possible outcomes and not just the ones you want." Harry smiled slightly at his professor.

"Thank you, Harry, for forgiving me. I'll keep your advice in mind for the future because it's good advice. Please, enjoy your new home." Professor Dumbledore then turned to Mr. Davis. "I'll have the necessary forms to you tomorrow, Mr. Davis." Tracey's father nodded.

"There's just one problem," Dumbledore said slowly, as if worried that he had to say it.

"There is?" Tracey and Harry asked at the same time. Mr. Davis was nodding as if he understood what Professor Dumbledore was saying, though.

"Yes, though it's more of an addition. Because Mr. Potter does have a godfather, the change of guardianship will have to include something about him." Mr. Davis just nodded in agreement. "I was thinking that we could add that if his parents' chosen guardian could suddenly take Harry, then Harry could have the choice of who to live with and have as a guardian. Does that work with all of you?"

Harry, confused as he didn't even know he had a godfather, just nodded his agreement as it seemed to work for him. Tracey, seeing Harry agree, sighed slightly before agreeing herself. Mrs. Davis looked at her husband, who was thinking carefully for a moment before he realized that it was probably the best they could do as it would give them a chance to keep Harry. Both nodded their acceptance at the same time.

"Well, then, I believe our work is done here," Professor Dumbledore said. "Mr. Davis, I'll come by your home tomorrow to finish the forms?" The headmaster made it sound like a question, not a statement, so Mr. Davis nodded.

With that, Professor Dumbledore left the room. Harry was about to ask who his godfather was and why everyone seemed so worried about it, but Tracey shook her head just enough for him to see, so he kept quiet. Both children just followed the adults out of the room and to the Floo, which had amazed Harry as the idea of traveling

through fireplaces was something he had never thought about before. He had quickly learned that he didn't like the experience as the spinning and colors made him dizzy; Harry also couldn't land on his feet at the end.

Just as the group got to the Floo, Madam Bones caught up to the group as she was going to go home and give Susan the journal and grab some lunch. Harry remembered something just as she got there, and turned to Tracey to ask her something.

"Trace, you have the purple one with you?" Harry watched as her confused look quickly turned to one of realization.

"You're lucky I brought all of the ones we've got so far with me," Tracey replied with a smile. "You never know who you're going to run into while you're at the Ministry."

Harry just smiled at the excuse as he took the purple journal from Tracey's bag the moment she had it open. He then turned to Madam Bones, who was talking with Tracey's parents about the sort of information they'd get as Harry's guardians, and walked up to her slowly.

"Madam Bones?" he asked cautiously when there was a break in the conversation.

"Yes, Mr. Potter?" she replied as she turned to face the two children.

"We just remembered that Susan and Hannah were planning to spend a lot of time together this summer, and... well..." Harry then held out the purple journal with the back up so that she could see Hannah Abbott on it as an explanation.

"You'd like me to get this to Hannah for you?" Madam Bones asked with a smile that reminded both children of Susan. They nodded. "Of course I will. This might help the two of them keep in touch without running owls ragged or driving Hannah's family crazy." Madam Bones was smiling as she said that and took the journal from Harry.

"Thank you," they both said at the same moment, which seemed to surprise Madam Bones for a moment.

"Susan told me that you two act like twins, but I didn't see what she meant until now." Both Harry and Tracey blushed slightly as they heard that, but the smiles stayed on their faces.

"Thank you for what you've done, Amelia, but we'd better get going," Mr. Davis said from beside the fireplace.

"Of course, of course," Madam Bones said. "You both probably have some friends to tell the news to. I'll make sure Hannah and Susan get these today." She held up the journals. "You all enjoy the rest of the summer."

Harry followed Tracey through the Floo and back to her home. Tracey was waiting to grab his arm on the other side so that he wouldn't end up on the floor like he had the last time. Harry just smiled his thanks as he moved out of the way and dusted himself off as soot fell from his clothes.

The two children rushed to Harry's room once Tracey's mother told them they had about an hour before dinner. Harry sat against the headboard of his bed with a pillow behind him. Tracey was going to go sit at his desk, but Harry called her over to his bed and pointed at the space next to him. Tracey just smiled at she settled in a position almost identical to Harry's.

Both pulled out their journals, though Harry's was in his pocket while Tracey's was in her bag, and activated them before putting their pencils in the corners so that they could talk instead of writing.

Daphne: FINALLY! What happened?

Both: Calm down, Daphne.

Harry: Man, Blaise, did you purposely get her all worked up while we were gone?

Blaise: Nope. This time it was all Theo.

Theo: Hey! It was not! I just got on myself a minute ago. My mother decided I needed to clean about six different rooms for no reason at all.

Daphne: We're getting off track here! What happened?

Tracey: Well, Dumbledore fought the change as hard as he could. Of course, it seems like Harry's aunt lied up a storm to him. Daddy told them all the truth, and then Harry got up and stated that he was never going back to that – that...

Harry: Hell-hole?

Tracey: Yes! Hell-hole ever again. He also said that it would never be his home again. I guess that one statement is what changed it all because Dumbledore said he'd personally fill out the forms to switch guardianship.

Harry: I got annoyed and asked him why. Turns out he had some sort of Blood Ward – whatever that is – at my aunt's house, but they were destroyed the moment I said that house wasn't my home ever again. Stupid reason to send me back, but whatever, nothing I can do about it.

Blaise: So... You're free?

Both: Yup!

Daphne: YES!

Blaise: Awesome!

Theo: Thank Merlin!

Harry and Tracey suddenly looked over to the left fold of the journal as something caught their eyes and smiled when they saw that both Susan and Hannah had just touched their journals, accepting ownership of them and making it so that they were on the list of the people not on at that moment.

Harry: I believe we're about to get a couple more people in the conversation.

Before anyone could reply, Susan and Hannah signed on. Harry and Tracey shared a quick look.

Tracey: Hi Susan.

Harry: Hi Hannah.

Susan: What are these things?

Tracey: Like the note said, they're Messenger Journals. My father makes them so that my friends and I can talk easier.

Hannah: And you gave one to each of us?

Harry: Well, yeah, you're both our friends.

Daphne: You didn't tell us you managed to get them to them!

Harry: *Rolls eyes* Daphne, you've barely let us speak past telling you about the trial. How were we supposed to tell you that Susan's aunt was there or that we got a couple of journals to her to pass on?

Theo: He's got a point, Daphne.

Daphne: Shut up, Theo.

Theo: Shutting up. *Smirks*

Susan: Auntie didn't tell me how she got these except that they were from a couple of my friends from school; she didn't even tell me which ones.

Tracey: Harry and I gave them to her not all that long ago. We were at the Ministry to... Tracey paused there as she spoke, unsure if she should finish, but she didn't have to.

Harry: Change my guardians from my aunt and uncle to Tracey's parents.

Hannah: So you're at Tracey's house, Harry?

Blaise: If I'm right, and I'm pretty sure that I am, then they're both in what's now Harry's room. One or both of them is on his bed. If it's only one, then the other is at the desk.

Both: Oh, shut up, Blaise.

Theo: He's right.

Daphne: I'm going to go with they're both on the bed today.

Both: Shut up!

Snickers from multiple people

Susan: Are you all actually writing, because you seem to be writing fast if you are?

Harry: No, we're not. Put your quill at the top right corner of the rightmost fold and hold it there for at least five seconds before letting go. Then just talk and the journal will pick it all up.

Daphne: Trace, your dad still has to do that for the rest of us.

Blaise and Theo: Yeah!

Tracey: Get over here and he can. *Mutters something that sounds like idiots under breath* Gah! Why did the journal have to pick that up?

Harry: *Is snickering* Because even I could hear that one.

Tracey: *Glares at Harry*

Hannah: So we just talk like this...?

Susan: Looks like it.

Daphne: Yeah, you've got it.

Susan: This is cool. It'll be useful in school when we're alone to just be able to talk if we're doing homework and can't write as easily.

Harry: Yeah. It's going to be fun using these this year.

Hannah: Who are you going to give them to?

Tracey: We've already gotten my dad to make one for Hermione, Neville, each of the twins, Terry, Padma, and Justin. Plus, the next time Daphne is here, we've got one for her younger sister, Astoria.

It'll make it easier for the two of them to keep in touch as Astoria doesn't start until our third year.

Daphne: Yeah. Astoria was a bit upset that I didn't write as often as she had wanted me to, so I thought this would make her happy.

Theo: Wait, you're forgetting Draco, Trace.

Harry: Oh, that's right. We'd better remember to tell your dad that, Tracey.

Tracey: What color should he have, though?

Harry: Silver, duh.

"Harry, Tracey, time for lunch!" Both of them looked up as they heard Tracey's mother calling them down to eat.

Both: We've gotta go eat. We'll talk to you all this evening.

Harry: Tell Susan and Hannah the normal schedule. We'll be using it again tomorrow. Though we might be trying to get at least a few of you over here in the next couple of days to hang out. Bye!

Both children closed their journals and went to wash up for lunch. Harry had never felt happier than he did right then. He knew he didn't have to ever go back to the Dursley's, he had a great group of friends, and this was the best summer he had ever had.

Probably not what a lot of you were hoping for when it comes to the Harry/Dumbledore conflict, but like I said when I posted this on SIYE, their conflict is a big part of the plot of this story, just not until a lot later. Heck, I haven't even written that part yet; it's just somewhat planned in my head. You'll see more of those two arguing, just not until 5th or 6th year.

Uh... Oh, right! Couple things to add about the trial. The way Harry and Tracey were talking was why Madam Bones believed them about the Journals without having them prove it to her. Also, Harry hasn't forgiven Dumbledore completely, just enough to let the Dursleys go for now.

Merry (Late) Christmas! I hope you all had a good holiday if you celebrate it.

I hope you enjoyed the chapter, and if you could leave a review, that would be awesome. :) Until next week (When I'll be home again)! Oh, enjoy the snow if you've got any. We're about to get some here, and then I'm going back to the place where it doesn't snow... *Sigh* Oh well. Have a good week!

Posted: 12/26/10

Chapter Thirteen

"Argh!"

Harry was jolted awake by Tracey jumping onto his legs a week after the trial. Harry was normally up before Tracey, but it seemed that she had decided to set an alarm just so that she could wake up Harry on the day of their Diagon Alley trip.

"TRACEY!" Harry yelled as he realized who it was that had jumped on him. "Did you have to jump on me to wake me up? You could have just shaken me or something."

"Where's the fun in that?" Tracey asked with an innocent smile on her face from her position on Harry's legs.

Instead of answering, Harry just used his legs to push Tracey off of his bed before getting out of it himself. He then glanced at the clock by his bed and had to hold in a groan as he saw it was only seven in the morning. Glaring at Tracey, he grabbed some clothes and went into the bathroom to shower and get ready for the day.

When he walked into the kitchen half an hour later, Tracey was sitting at the table with her journal in front of her and open, a pencil in her hand as she read what at least one of their friends was writing. Harry slipped into the chair beside her and pulled the journal closer to him so that they could both read it. Tracey didn't even care as they both did this a lot; neither of them minded when the other did things like that.

Harry slipped the second pencil out of the holder and read what was being said.

Daphne: My mum says we're leaving at nine to go to Diagon Alley.

Theo: Lucky... My father is making me leave in an hour. We'll be there at half past eight. It seems he wants to go to Gringotts as well as a few stores that have nothing to do with my supplies before we meet up with you all.

Tracey: Daddy says that he'll be taking Harry and me at eight-thirty, too, but that's so that Harry and I can go to Gringotts for a bit.

Harry stole the journal from Tracey as he didn't really feel like talking that early in the morning. It wasn't an uncommon thing for Tracey and Harry to talk through their journals when it was too early or they were in different rooms.

Harry: We are?

Tracey: Yeah. Daddy's going to let us go down to the Storage Vault while he takes care of a few things with the goblins.

Harry: Sweet!

Theo: If you're going to be there at the same time as me, can I join you? I'd rather not join father as he goes on one of his business runs...

Tracey: As long as Harry doesn't mind.

Harry: I don't mind at all. Actually... I keep forgetting to take that stuff out of my bags from last time. We'd better do that after we eat, Trace.

Tracey: Oh yeah. We've got all those books to look through, don't we?

Harry: Yup.

Blaise: Morning guys... *Yawns*

Daphne: Morning, Blaise.

Blaise: My mum just woke me up. Something about leaving for the Alley in an hour or something.

Daphne: Why is it I'm the only one not getting there at the same time as the rest of you?

Susan signed on before anyone could reply.

Susan: I just got up, so when is everyone getting there?

Daphne: Everyone but me is getting there at eight-thirty. I'm getting there at nine.

Susan: Hannah and I are going with Auntie at nine to the Alley.

Theo: So... Harry, Trace, Blaise, and I can go to Harry's Storage Vault, and then we'll meet up with three – sorry, four if we count Astoria – on the steps of Gringotts?

Blaise: I'll have to ask if I can go to the Vault, but it sounds good to me.

Susan: Same with me.

Tracey: Harry's eating eggs right now, so I'm not letting him near my journal, but I asked and he said it's fine with him.

Hannah: Well, then, we'd better not get in the way of eating. See you all in a bit!

...

Harry pulled out the pouch and the book bag from the last trip to Gringotts almost two weeks earlier.

"Here, Tracey, you take out the books and stack them on the floor or something." Harry passed her the bag with the books.

Harry then went and sat on his bed with the other bag. He carefully pulled out the daggers and pocketknives from the vault. Laying the daggers all out in a careful line on his bed with each color near the same colors, he admired them for their beauty. It was obvious that they were made very carefully; Harry would even wager a guess to say that they were all goblin-made.

Once that was done, he took the pocketknives and looked at them carefully. His eyes opened in surprise when he found a note attached to one of them telling him what they all did. Each knife could open any locked door, untie a rope, pick a lock, and cut through most metals, though some took longer than others.

A smile crossed his face as he put the silver pocketknives with the emerald daggers, the gold with the ruby daggers, the bronze with the sapphire daggers, and the plain black ones with the citrine daggers.

After that, Harry took out the dragonhide boots. Putting aside the pair for Tracey's mother, he put the rest with the green daggers to give to his Slytherin friends. The dragonhide wand holsters were next. He decided to not go by house color this time, and started sorting.

Draco got one of the two silvers Harry had grabbed while Fred got the other and George got a green. Daphne got gold like Tracey; Theo got a blue; Blaise got a black; Hermione got a brown; Neville got a bronze; Justin got black; Hannah got one of the greens as she liked the color; Susan got red; Padma also got a brown; Terry got blue, which would make him happy as it was his favorite color. Harry thought for a moment before grabbing another gold and putting it with the spare emerald dagger and silver pocketknife he had grabbed by mistake; he was planning on giving them to Astoria for Christmas so that she'd have them by the time she got to Hogwarts the following year.

Finally, Harry took out the box with the stag and lily carving on it. One of his hands held the box just large enough to hold an envelope while the other pulled the gold chain from under his shirt to hold onto the rings there tightly. A lone tear ran down his face as he thought of his parents before putting the box on his bedside table. He kept the rings outside of his shirt.

Once he was done, he looked up to see that Tracey had all of the books sorted by subject and had just finished herself. She looked up and smiled at him before walking over and wiping the tear away from his cheek.

"I know you miss them, but I think they'd love the person you've become," she whispered as she looked at the rings around his neck. Harry smiled in return. Tracey always knew what was on his mind and how to help him.

"These are yours," Harry said as he held out one of the daggers and pocketknives in Slytherin colors.

"We'll have to look for belts while we're in the vault later," Tracey commented as she put the weapons in the pocket of her robe, which she was already wearing even though they still had twenty minutes before they left.

"Yeah, you're right," Harry agreed as he took his own weapons and put them back in the pouch before attaching it to his jeans with the clip on the back.

"How are we going to get these to the others?" Tracey asked as she looked at the items lined up on the bed.

"Well, some of these will be given on the train," Harry said as he put the four Gryffindor, two Ravenclaw, and one Hufflepuff sets onto his truck, careful to keep the stuff separate. "The rest we'll give to them today. Well, except for Draco's and Astoria's. I want hers to be a Christmas gift, and Draco we won't see until the train either." The two Slytherin sets were added to the trunk as well.

"Put them into the book bag that we're bringing anyway," Tracey decided before grabbing it. "You'll empty most of it before we get to the vault anyway."

Both of them put the rest of the sets into the bag before Harry found his robe, boots, and money bag. He put the bag onto his other hip while the boots and robe went on. Slinging the book bag over his head and shoulder to rest on the other shoulder, Harry walked to the door and turned at the doorway to see if Tracey was following. Smiling, she followed.

...

"Can Griphook please take my three friends and me down to the Potter Storage Vault?" Harry asked when they got to Gringotts, his scar visible so that the goblin would know it was really him.

"Of course," the teller said, though he looked a little surprised that Harry had asked for a specific goblin.

"Come with me, Mr. Potter," Griphook said minutes later when he got there.

When they finally got to the vault after the amazingly fun ride, Griphook opened the vault again and told them he'd wait outside. The four friends went into the vault.

"Whoa! This is all yours, Harry?" Theo said as he stared around the vault.

"Yeah," Harry replied as he looked around again.

"Harry, the bag," Tracey said to remind him.

"Oh, right!" Harry opened the bag over his shoulder and pulled out the boots, daggers, knives, and want holsters for his two friends; he and Tracey had decided to give them the boots now. "These are for you both. I've got some for all the main people in the group."

"Harry, these are goblin-made!" Blaise exclaimed as he looked at the dagger Harry had just handed him. Theo was putting the boots on.

"I thought they might be, but I wasn't sure," Harry admitted as he looked around the weapons for belts.

"Harry!" Tracey called from over by the dragonhide. Harry turned and saw her holding up belts made of the hide.

"Perfect!" he exclaimed as he rushed over and saw that they were all in the same colors as the holsters.

Working quickly, he grabbed the same number of belts in each color as he had of the holsters so that they'd match. He slipped his own emerald green belt on, put the sheathed dagger on it, and attached both the money bag and pouch to it as well.

Harry then held out a gold belt to Tracey, a blue to Theo, and a black to Blaise. Each of them copied Harry in putting the belts and daggers on them. None of his friends tried to decline the offers because they knew that Harry wouldn't take no for an answer, and they also all realized that this was his way of saying thank you for being there for him. Plus, he hadn't gotten any of them anything for birthday gifts last year, so it was only fair.

When they were done, each member of the group split up and went to look around. Blaise went to go look at the books while Theo went to go check out all the dragonhide. Tracey went to see the jewelry, just to see what was good in the collection. Harry, on the other hand, went to go look at the weapons again.

Harry kept picking up the different swords. Some had different gems in them while others were just made well. None of them felt right to him, so he left the swords alone and went to go check out the bows. The bows ranged from almost white to almost black. All of the bows were light and beautifully fletched, some even having carvings in them.

Done, Harry went to go join Blaise at the bookshelves. Harry and Tracey had already got all the books they could, but Harry saw a small bookshelf in a corner of the vault and went over to check it out.

"Where are you going, Harry?" Tracey asked quietly as he passed her on his way to the shelf.

"The shelf over in the corner," Harry replied while as pointed at it. Tracey caught up to him as he walked over to it.

"There's nothing there, Harry," she tried to tell him, but he just shook his head and kept walking until he reached the shelf. "Harry!" Harry turned quickly to see that Tracey seemed to be stopped by a sort of barrier.

"Tracey, I think this corner is only for Potters and their families," Harry said quietly before turning back to the shelf as he heard Tracey walk off once she understood what he meant.

Harry looked at the books with his eyes widening more and more with each spine he read. The books here weren't books but journals of all kinds: personal, potions, spells, work, and family. Oh, there were a few normal books, but they were all about the Potter family.

Working quickly, Harry grabbed all the books on his family before turning to the journals. At the topmost shelf with books, which was about a third of the way to the top and half full, Harry saw books from his parents. Almost reverently, Harry picked up all the journals his parents had written from his mom's potions and charms journals to his dad's transfiguration ones. He put all of the journals into his bag before finding the personal ones and adding those too.

Harry turned to leave the corner, tears running down his cheeks as he thought about all the things he might find in those journals and books, when he saw something else that shocked him. There was a

case on the wall with so many wands he couldn't count them all. There was a name under each one, some with purely Potter in the name while others had Potter as either the first or second part of their surnames. At the very end were the names James Potter, Lily Evans-Potter, and Harry Potter. Harry's was the only one without a wand above his name.

Harry closed his eyes tightly as he lightly touched his parents' wands, unable to hold back the tears. He didn't know how long he stood there, his eyes closed tightly, tears running down his face, and a hand on his parents' wands, but eventually, Tracey went to the barrier and called his name, trying to get him to leave.

When Harry left the corner, Tracey wrapped an arm around his waist and kept it there as they walked back to the others. Theo and Blaise looked at Harry in concern as they saw the tears running down his face.

"Their wands are in there," Harry whispered through his tears. "And they left journals." Harry gestured to his bag.

"Oh, Harry," Tracey said quietly yet sadly.

"I'm okay," he muttered as he wiped his face with his sleeve while his other hand closed around the rings still on the outside of his shirt. "Did you guys find anything?"

"I found a few good books to read," Blaise said as he held up one of the book bags like the one Harry was wearing.

"I found a single book," Theo admitted. "I was mainly looking at the dragonhide. Did you see the cloaks they've made out of it?"

"No, I didn't," Harry said. "Show us?"

Theo took the group and showed them all the cloaks, which had been hidden underneath the armor. Smiling slightly, Harry told Theo to take his favorite one and keep it. He then collected more and put them into his book bag, which was getting very full.

"For Christmas, so you both can't take one right now," Harry told Tracey and Blaise. "I don't mind if you know what you're getting this year because it means you'll know it's special."

Harry looked around for another bag and was pleased to find one of dragonhide that looked just like the one for books. When he put the cloaks into it instead of the other one, they shrunk and lost all weight, which made him add the weapons to it to. Slipping it onto the other shoulder, Harry kept both bags with him and smiled as he barely felt any weight from either one.

"Let's just go," Harry said quietly once he had all he would need. The others agreed and they all left to go back to the surface where they met Tracey's father, who had a folder of papers with him now.

"All done?" he asked when they got there. Tracey just nodded. "Then let's go meet the others."

When they got outside, Susan, Hannah, and Daphne all rushed up to them while someone else followed slowly. Harry let the girls talk to the other three while he stayed to the side. The fourth girl walked up to him instead of the others.

Turning to look at her, he realized that this must be Astoria. While Daphne had blond hair and sharp blue eyes, Astoria had light brown hair and the same eyes. Just looking into her eyes, Harry could tell that not only was she smart, but she'd be a Slytherin without a doubt. The way her eyes were observing everything and taking in every detail had Slytherin written all over it.

"You must be Astoria," Harry said as he held his hand out for her to shake.

"Yes, and you're Harry Potter," the girl replied in a soft voice that reminded Harry more of Tracey than of Daphne as she shook his hand.

"Hey, Trace!" Harry called over his shoulder once he let go of Astoria's hand. "Turquoise!" Tracey nodded as she got his meaning and pulled out a turquoise journal, which she threw over Theo's head to Harry, who caught it quickly.

"I believe Daphne's told you about these," Harry said as he turned back to Astoria and opened the journal to show her the three folds and the two pencils. "These are Muggle pencils; they work better than quills."

Astoria smiled slightly and grabbed the journal after Harry closed it, claiming it as her own. Harry watched as she shrunk it and slipped it into her pocket without even thinking about what she was doing. He had to smile as he realized she must have watched Daphne do that hundreds of times this summer.

"Now that we're all caught up, let's get shopping," Mr. Davis said.

"Auntie Amelia will be right out, Mr. Davis," Susan said so that he'd wait another minute or two.

"Ah, yes, and how about your mother, Daphne?" Mr. Davis asked as he realized the adults weren't there.

"She told Astoria and I that she had things to do and would just meet us at home. I just have to make sure I don't lose Astoria while we're here," Daphne explained while Astoria made a face at the last part.

"Okay," Mr. Davis agreed. "Theodore, Blaise, your parents already told me that they'd send some clothes over to my home and you could spend the night with Harry and Tracey."

All four of the kids smiled as they heard that since it would be the third time in a week. Each time the others slept over, they would all stay up late talking and then sleep in the next morning. It was a lucky thing that Harry had finally finished his homework the day before the trial.

Just then Amelia Bones walked out of the bank and joined the happy group of friends. They all set off to the apothecary to get their potions supplies before going to get new parchment, quills, and ink. Harry and Tracey made faces as they had to get that as they'd rather use Muggle pens and pencils than quills and ink.

"The wizards in Britain are so old fashioned," Harry moaned as they left the shop. "Pens don't need to be dipped into anything and they're cheap. Pencils can be erased. Why we're still using quills and ink I'll never understand."

"Can I see one of these pencils you use?" Madam Bones asked Harry. Harry slipped one out of his journal after making it normal

sized. "Interesting... it doesn't need any ink at all, and this lets you erase mistakes so that you can fix them?"

"Yup," Harry replied.

"I might have to see about getting a bunch of these as well as pens for the DMLE," she muttered as she handed the pencil back to Harry, who put it away.

"If you can convince Hogwarts to switch over, I'd willingly pay for any pens and pencils you need for the DMLE for an entire year," Harry told her.

"I'll talk to Dumbledore about it, but the purebloods will be a problem," Madam Bones informed Harry. "They're too set in their ways to change. Plus, many of them would hate the idea of using Muggle objects."

"Show them how much better they are, then," Harry argued. "If they realize ink stains won't happen anymore, they might change their minds. Plus, it's not like we're forcing it on them, just the school."

"True... I'll speak to Dumbledore about it," Madam Bones promised.

After that, the group went to Madam Malkin's to get new robes and cloaks and some of the group had grown over the year and summer. Harry didn't get a new cloak, but he got robes.

From there they went to Flourish & Blotts to get their school books. Harry took one look at Lockhart's books and threw them into his bag; he didn't even want to look at them. The covers were ridiculous and a quick flip through to see the dates the events occurred said that they all overlapped, meaning he was a fraud. The rest of the books were fine.

The boys dragged the rest into Gambol & Japes, a joke shop. After getting a few supplies, they stopped by the owl shop to get treats for their owls. The final shop was, of course, the Quidditch shop.

Harry got new pads along with gloves made especially for Seekers. Theo and Blaise got new pads as their old ones from playing at home were getting worn. The girls looked around, but none of them

were very interested in playing Quidditch, though all of them liked it and didn't mind the boys dragging them into the shop.

Once they were all finally done, the group left the Alley and went into the Leaky Cauldron, a pub that was the entrance to the Alley, to get some lunch. Mr. Davis and Madam Bones went to their own table a little bit away from the kids so that they could be by themselves.

"Hey guys," Harry called down both sides of the table as he was in the middle with Tracey on one side and Astoria on the other. "I've got something for most of you." Everyone looked up at that. "These are from my Storage Vault."

Harry passed the different sets around the table, saying who each set belonged to so that they got to the right people. When he was done, everyone but Astoria had a set as the others had gotten them earlier. Everyone was comparing them, so Harry was able to listen to Astoria when she pulled on his sleeve.

"Nothing for me?" she asked sadly. Harry looked at the others before leaning in to whisper in her ear.

"Except for Theo, no one else has one of these yet. They're all going to get one for Christmas." Harry handed her a gold cloak to match the gold holster he planned to give her for Christmas. "Plus, who says you aren't getting that stuff later on?"

Harry winked at her as he sat up straight again. She smiled as she figured out what he was saying. Astoria would get the same stuff, just not yet; instead, she got something only one other person in the group would have until later that year.

Everyone thanked Harry as they put the holsters, belts, and daggers on. Pocketknives went into pockets, wands into holsters, and Daphne slipped on boots. After that, lunch was a loud affair with lots of joking, stories, and just talking.

When it was finally time to go, everyone was surprised to find out that Madam Bones and Mr. Davis had contacted families and gotten permission for everyone to stay with Harry and Tracey that night. Daphne, Astoria, Susan, and Hannah had to go home to get clothes, but they would then head straight over to the Davis home after dropping off their things.

That night, it was a continuation of lunch as everyone went swimming and then for a fly before dinner. It wasn't until Tracey's mother sent them all to bed at midnight that they all finally went to sleep.

Happy New Year! I hope 2011 is a good year for everyone.

Well, for those of you waiting for Ginny, she'll be here in the next chapter. Maybe then I'll stop being annoyed by people about her. :-P

Anyway, this was more of a show the friends chapter more than anything. They'll be on the Hogwarts Express next chapter.

Please review?

Posted: 1/2/11

Chapter Fourteen

Harry woke up the morning of August Thirty-First and sighed. It was the last day of summer, and he and Tracey would be going back to school the next day. They were both planning on packing their trunks that morning after breakfast.

Thinking back to the past two weeks of the break, Harry smiled lightly. Almost every day had at least one person of the group over at the Davis house; the last few days Harry and Tracey had gone to Susan's house with Hannah and some of the others. While it confused him at first, Harry quickly picked up that Tracey's house was the easiest to be at because it was a neutral one.

Groaning slightly, Harry got out of bed and went to the bathroom to shower and change his clothes. When he was done, he walked quietly down to the kitchen and found that only Mrs. Davis was up. Sharing a smile, both of them worked together to make a quick breakfast just as they had done many times over the summer. It had become a tacit agreement to work together if they were the only ones up. The agreement also meant the house-elves got a break for breakfast.

After everything was put onto the dining room table, Harry went and knocked on Tracey's door. She had told him quite forcefully the first day that he wasn't allowed in her room, and he accepted it without complaint. Whenever he was sent to wake her up, he just knocked on the door and waited until he heard her moving around.

Once sure Tracey was up and moving, Harry went back to the table and served himself breakfast. By the time Tracey walked in fully dressed and showered, Harry was halfway through his eggs and had already eaten three pieces of bacon and a slice of toast. Tracey joined him at the table moments before Mr. and Mrs. Davis entered the room and sat down.

By the time both Tracey and Harry were done eating, they were awake enough to start packing. Going to their own rooms, they couldn't talk, so they just went to work.

Harry put his potions kit and cauldron at the bottom of his trunk along with his Christmas gifts as he was hiding them. Next went Lockhart's books followed by those from his Vault, which he hadn't

gotten the chance to look through really. After that went his uniforms followed by robes. At the top went his ink, quills, parchment, homework, and book bag.

Done with all of that, Harry turned to his dragonhide bag. In it he put all of the journals for the others, which he had finally gotten Tracey to give to him, the weapons for the others, and his dragonhide cloak.

Once that was all done, he closed everything up, put his clothes for the next day on top of his trunk, and sat down on his bed with his journal. Sighing lightly, he lay down on his bed, closed his eyes, and just left his closed journal on his chest as he relaxed. Harry didn't feel like talking all that much right then.

A few hours later, Tracey went into his room and found him asleep. Smiling lightly, she went and sat at his desk and wrote to the others instead of talking. They all recognized the difference, but didn't say anything as she told them Harry was asleep.

It wasn't until Tracey's mother called them down for lunch that Tracey finally woke Harry up. Smiling sheepishly, Harry joined her for lunch and then a fly outside, after which he packed his Nimbus 2000. The two then decided to go for a final swim in the pool before dinner.

That night, both of them went to bed at nine without complaint, knowing that they'd be up early to get to the train on time.

...

Harry walked into King's Cross with his trunk on a trolley in front of him. He watched as Tracey and her mother walked through the barrier to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. Tracey's father was going to go through with Harry.

As the two males headed to the barrier, Harry thought about the scarlet train he'd see on the other side and smiled. That smile turned into a grimace of pain when his trolley banged into the barrier and right into his chest. Luckily, Mr. Davis caught Harry before he fell over. Hedwig screeched in her cage, but Harry quickly pulled out an owl treat and fed it to her, quieting her.

"What's wrong with the barrier, Mr. Davis? Tracey just got through," Harry said, looking just as confused as Mr. Davis.

"I'm not sure. Let me try something..." Mr. Davis pulled out his wand and leaned against the barrier to hide the fact that he was using it to tap the barrier. After a minute or two of it, he sighed. "Harry, try contacting Tracey with your Journal. Let her and her mother know what's going on. I'm going to keep working on this."

Harry nodded and got his journal out. Activating it, Harry quickly slipped his pencil out of its case and began explaining the situation to Tracey, who was frantic at the moment.

Just as Tracey was going to ask what was taking so long, Mr. Davis suddenly almost fell through the barrier. Smiling at Harry, he led the boy through the barrier after the emerald journal was put away without explanation.

"Harry!" Tracey yelled as she jumped at the boy, who, quite used to this after the summer, caught her and held her in place until she let go. "What happened?"

"The barrier sealed itself, Trace," Harry replied as he moved his trolley out of the way of the barrier and towards the train.

"I wonder why," she said much more calmly as she turned back into her normal, quiet self.

"Who knows?" Harry shrugged. "We can talk about it later. Let's go find a compartment."

Tracey sighed and gave it up for the moment. Together, they found a compartment about halfway down the train as it was just after ten and the train didn't leave until eleven. Once their stuff was on the racks inside, they went out to say goodbye to Tracey's parents.

"Thank you for everything you've done for me this summer," Harry said with his throat tight. He didn't know how else to say it because there weren't enough words in the world to describe how thankful he was to Tracey and her parents.

"Harry, you don't have to thank us," Mrs. Davis said.

"We did it because we wanted to, not because we had to," Mr. Davis said.

"You're like my brother, Harry," Tracey muttered quietly from beside him. "We take care of our own, and you're one of us now, Harry."

"Tracey's right, Harry; you're one of us now, and we take care of our own," Mr. Davis said.

"Thank you," Harry finally managed to get past the lump in his throat.

Tracey hugged Harry from behind while both of her parents hugged him from the front. Harry's hands went to the chain around his neck and closed around the rings hanging there. He knew, right then, that his parents would be proud and approve of what he had done with his life. Finally, he stopped fighting the tears and let two fall down his face, one on each side.

When they all let go, each of Tracey's parents wiped away a tear. All four of them had a small smile on their face. Harry and Tracey said goodbye one last time and then went back to the compartment they had found on the train.

Slowly, one-by-one, their friends all made their way into the compartment with their trunks. Daphne came first after saying goodbye to Astoria. Theo slipped in moments before Blaise joined them.

Susan and Hannah dragged Justin over about five minutes after Blaise got there. Harry gave him his yellow journal, black wand holster, black belt, citrine dagger, and black pocketknife. Susan and Hannah promised to tell Justin all about the journals in their own compartment and dragged him out.

Hermione and Neville came to join the compartment as they couldn't hang out with their own House. Neville got a white journal while Hermione got a brown one. The bronze dragonhide reserved for Neville and the brown for Hermione was well received; neither tried to fight it as the entire group knew how Harry was. He wouldn't take no for an answer when he didn't want to.

When the Weasley twins came to visit... Harry got to have a lot of fun with them.

"Hey you two," Tracey said as Harry began searching through his dragonhide bag.

"Hey," one twin, who only Harry could tell was Fred, said.

"What's going on in here?" George asked.

"Harry's giving out gifts to all of his closest friends," Hermione said.

"Gifts?" George asked.

"For us?" Fred added, pretending to look surprised.

"You shouldn't have!" they exclaimed together.

"These belong to you now," Harry said as he held out two ruby daggers and two gold pocketknives.

Harry and the Slytherins were fighting to keep in laughter while Hermione and Neville were wondering why the twins only got two things.

"Thank you!" Both of the boys took their gifts and turned to leave.

"What, don't you want the rest?" Tracey asked innocently. Both boys turned so fast Harry thought they had broken their necks doing it.

Harry pulled one of the silver belts and holsters with one hand while the other pulled out the same objects in emerald green. "Silver," he stated as he handed Fred the silver objects. "Emerald," he finished as he gave George the other ones. The twins laughed good-naturedly as they put the dragonhide items on.

"And now we're going to be kind," Daphne, Theo, and Blaise said at the same time, copying how Harry and Tracey normally spoke.

Harry held out a gold journal to Fred and a scarlet one to George. "Silver, you may claim the nickname of Gold for today only. Emerald, you may claim the nickname of Scarlet for today only," Harry said, trying to be professional about it.

Harry actually kept a straight face until the twins burst out laughing. That was when he finally let go and copied his Slytherin friends by collapsing onto his seat and laughing so hard he was in tears. It took all nine of them at least three minutes to calm down, but they eventually did.

"Seriously, though," Harry said once he had his breath back, "these are yours." He held out the journals again.

"What are they?" the twins asked at once as Fred took the gold and George the scarlet; they both knew that Harry could tell them apart.

Harry left it up to the others to explain the journals as he collapsed into his seat again with a smile, checking his watch to see they had about three more minutes before the train left. He was planning on going to give Padma and Terry theirs when the train left the station. On top of that, he was going to find Draco and talk with him.

The twins eventually left, and the train began moving. Harry barely paid attention as his friends all began using the journals to chat around the train. In fact, it took Tracey elbowing him from her position next to him to make him pay attention to anything.

"What?" Harry muttered in annoyance as he rubbed his side because of the pain there after being elbowed. Tracey just pointed to the door. "Oh."

At the door was Draco, and he was alone. He was looking anxiously around as he waited out there. Harry gestured for him to come in and Draco did after looking around once more. The moment he was in, he pulled the blinds on the windows closed.

"What's up, Draco?" Harry asked as everyone watched Draco and his odd behavior.

"Father has spies all over the school in the form of Slytherins," Draco said quietly, as if afraid he'd be overheard.

"Oh, come on..." Harry muttered as his mind went through the spells he knew until he found the one he needed. "Silencio," he said while pointing his wand at the door. "There, you're free to talk."

"Thanks," Draco said as he breathed a sigh of relief.

"No problem," Harry replied as he sat back down again and began looking through his bag.

"Harry, father wants me on the Quidditch team, and he's got the brooms to bribe them with to get me on," Draco said so fast that a couple blinked in surprise. "The problem is, I don't know what spot to go out for except Seeker, and that's your spot..."

"Draco," Theo interrupted, "do you remember all those times when we were younger and played Quidditch?" Draco nodded. "I've always said that you're a good Seeker, though you have nothing on Harry, but I always saw you as a Chaser, not a Seeker."

"And I've always seen you as a Chaser as well, Theo," Blaise said.

"You'd be a good Keeper, Blaise," Theo returned. "Anyway, what I'm saying is go for Chaser. You're better than any of the ones we have on the team right now."

"What about you and Blaise?" Draco asked as he seemed to be thinking it through.

"What do you mean?" Blaise asked.

"He's asking if we should take over the Quidditch team and make over half of it second years," Harry said, a smirk on his face as he thought about the brilliance of it. "I personally think it's a brilliant idea. You three should try out and prove to Flint that we'd make the team at least ten times better than it already is."

The three boys shared looks while Harry pulled out the stuff for Draco. By the time he was done, the three boys had huge smiles on their faces and were nodding. Harry snickered at the sight before coughing to get their attention.

"This is for you, Draco. All but the journal comes from me." Harry held out a silver journal, emerald dagger, silver pocketknife, silver dragonhide belt, black dragonhide boots, and a silver dragonhide wand holster. Everyone in the group knew that Draco really loved silver.

"Harry's been giving similar things to all of his closest friends today," Neville said quietly from his place in the corner of the compartment by the window.

"Wow," Draco gasped in awe. "This dagger is goblin-made and this is all dragonhide... Harry, all of this is amazing!" Harry just smiled in response. "What's with the journal, though?"

"It's a communicator," Tracey explained.

"We call them Messenger Journals," Theo stated as he held up his own for Draco to see. "If you activate it and sign on, you can write in it or talk to it in a specific way and everyone else using one can see it."

"A bunch of people have them now," Blaise elaborated. "Put your index finger onto the leftmost flap." Draco did as he was told.

"Whoa!"

"Amazing, eh? Well, if you write on the rightmost flap and press the little box at the bottom, everyone else can see it. Also, if you talk while the quill or pencil – that's a Muggle thing used to write and it's much better than a quill – is on the rightmost flap, it appears in the middle page, which is where the conversation is, automatically."

"This is so awesome," Draco murmured in awe.

Harry used that distraction to sneak out of the compartment. He didn't notice Tracey following him and he went off in search of the Ravenclaws. When he found Padma and Terry, he gave them the stuff and explained the journals to them quickly. The two of them were astounded by them.

When he turned to go back to the compartment, he was surprised to see Tracey leaning against the wall. She had a slight smile on her face as she looked at her almost-twin brother. Without a word, she turned and headed back to the compartment, Harry following.

Once they entered the room again, they quickly and quietly took their seat back; no one had even noticed they were gone as they had all started talking in the journals. Harry and Tracey joined the group.

Fred: These are so cool.

Padma: Yeah, they are.

George: Hey, Harry, is it alright if Fred and I bring our younger sister Ginny over to meet you and hang out in your compartment? She's bored in here and she does want to meet you.

Harry: *Groans quietly*

Fred: Oh, don't worry Harry. She wants to meet you, not the Boy-Who-Lived.

Tracey: Really?

George: Really. Because Ron's always complaining about Harry now, she doesn't know what to think, so she wants to make her own opinions on Harry and his friends.

Daphne: Then bring her over. She can spend the rest of the trip here with us.

Susan: How do you all have room in there? We've got six in here and we're packed. You all must have close to ten people now, and you're willing to take another person.

Theo: Uh... I might have asked my mum for a charm, and she gave me one...

Snickering from multiple people

Harry: Only you would think to do that, Theo, and then act like that when it's a great chance to brag.

Theo: *Glares at Harry*

Harry: Oh, I'm so scared! *Bursts out laughing*

Fred: Well, we're going to bring Ginny over. We'll be there in a minute or two.

Harry closed his journal after reading that. The others kept on talking, but he wasn't truly in the mood right then.

Without even thinking about it, Harry's hands went to the chain around his neck. He felt Tracey move next to him and looked over at her to see that she was looking at him closely, especially his hands. Sighing, Harry dropped his hands from their place on the chain, but she grabbed them and brought them back up to there with a small, sad smile on her face.

Harry was about to say something when the door opened and the twins popped their heads into the compartment. They didn't look at all surprised to see Draco in there. In fact, smiles came to their faces when they saw he was actually sitting with the rest of his fellow Slytherins instead of the idiots he had hung out with first year.

The two red-heads entered the compartment, and another, smaller red-head followed them in. Harry took a look at her as she looked around the compartment. Her red hair wasn't just one shade like the twins, Percy, or Ron; hers was multiple shades and seemed to match fire or a sunset. When she looked at him in the eye, Harry saw chocolate brown eyes looking back at him.

It didn't surprise Harry at all that the girl, Ginny, seemed to take in a lot of details in very little time; she was obviously a very observant girl. Her eyes, still looking at him, seemed to have a lot of knowledge behind them. To Harry, though, Ginny had a fire in her eyes that said not to mess with her unless you were ready for the consequences; it was something she obviously picked up from having six older brothers.

Harry cocked his head to the right at almost the exact same moment as Ginny did the same thing, which made the twins snort. Rolling his eyes at their antics, Harry was pleased to see a slight smile on Ginny's face in response.

"Hi, I'm Harry," he finally said as he held his hand out for her to shake.

"Ginny," she replied as she shook his hand.

"These are my friends, Tracey, Daphne, Theodore – he goes by Theo, though – Blaise, Hermione, Neville, Draco, and I believe you

know Silver and Emerald," Harry finished with a smirk as he went around the compartment to introduce everyone. Each person raised his or her hand or nodded when their name was said.

"Silver and Emerald?" Ginny snorted.

"Hey! You dubbed us Gold and Scarlet for the day!" the twins complained in one voice.

"I did, but I had to introduce you with your true names," Harry replied as he raised an eyebrow in their direction. "It seems it's a good thing I did. I can't believe you both didn't even tell your own sister about the famous two weeks of last year." Harry shook his head in mock disappointment.

"I guess we'll have to tell her," Blaise said with a smile on his face at the idea of retelling that story.

"Should we really be leaving her here, Fred?" George asked his twin as they faced one another.

"I'm not sure, oh twin of mine, should we?" Fred replied.

"Yes!" Ginny exclaimed. "So get out!" Ginny took out her wand.

The whole compartment watched in amusement as the twins' faces went from joking to scared in seconds once Ginny took out her wand. Their normally tanned faces went pale as they looked at her wand and slowly backed away to the door of the compartment. Once the door was open, the two of them were almost climbing over one another to get out of the room.

As the door shut, the whole compartment burst into laughter. Harry grabbed Ginny by the wrist and made her sit down next to him as they both laughed. When they finally calmed down, Harry flashed her a smile before turning to his friends.

"So... Who wants to tell the lovely lady the story of Silver and Emerald?" Harry asked the compartment at large.

"I'll start!" Blaise exclaimed before anyone else could say anything. Harry nodded his agreement.

"Ginny, did your brothers at least tell you about the first Quidditch match of the season? The Slytherin vs. Gryffindor one?" Ginny nodded. "So you know that Harry here caught the Snitch and won the game for Slytherin?" Ginny nodded again with a small smirk on her face.

"Well, your brothers were sore losers. The next morning, as each member of the team entered the room, they hexed them so that their hair was Gryffindor colors. Unfortunately, if the person with the hex on them tried to charm it off, it slowly spread down the body with each try." Ginny started snickering quietly along with most of the group.

"Harry was smart and realized that if someone else without the charm cast the counter, it would come off. Daphne got it off for him, and Harry then told the rest of the team so that it ruined the prank.

"Well, Harry here wanted revenge." Blaise paused. "I think Harry should tell this part as he never really explained it properly."

"What I'm about to say is to never leave this compartment," Harry said darkly as he took over the story. Everyone nodded solemnly. "Well, I wanted revenge, but I knew that I would need help doing it, so I went to the one person I knew would be the best help: Professor Snape." Draco, Hermione, Neville, and Ginny looked at him in surprise.

"I know, it's Snape, but I knew he'd be able to help. I asked him if he knew a potion that could turn a person another color, say silver or emerald. He realized quickly why I wanted it and accidentally told me that the instructions were on the classroom board for both potions, that a first year could brew them, and that the classroom would be open for the next few hours.

"I just went and brewed them." Harry shrugged. "No big deal."

"The thing is," Theo said as he took over the story, "Harry didn't want to retaliate right away. Those twins would be on guard for a return prank for the next few weeks. He waited."

"Christmas break came around," Daphne continued, "and Harry was the only Slytherin left at Hogwarts for the break. As you know, Ginny, your brothers were also still at Hogwarts. Now, all of us expected to

come back to Harry all moody and upset, but we come back and he's smiling."

"It was the oddest thing ever," Tracey agreed. "He was waiting for us in the Entrance Hall with a huge smile that made it seem like we had never even left. We found out moments later why he was so happy."

"Most of the students coming back from break were in the Entrance Hall when Harry called out for Silver and Emerald, telling them the school was back," Draco said as he cautiously picked up the story. "The next thing we know, two kids, one completely silver and the other completely emerald green, walk out of the shadows."

"It took everyone a few moments, but soon everyone realized they were wearing Gryffindor robes and they were the twins. Everyone tried to ask why they had done it and how they had done it."

"You brothers tried to play it up as them joining the Slytherin side," Hermione started, surprising everyone as no one had expected her to join in. "It was working until Harry elbowed them in the ribs. He just smiled up at them until they sighed."

"I was under their arms as they told the truth saying that they had been pranked over the break," Harry said with a smile that showed his pride at what he had succeeded in doing. "Everyone was amazed as they told them that I had pranked them. It took a few minutes, but then the Gryffindor Chasers and Seeker came up to me and congratulated me on a prank-well-done. Claimed that if I could prank the twins that well, I had to be a good person."

"How long were they like that?" Ginny asked as she finally got over laughing at the situation her brothers had been in.

"Oh, from Christmas until the Sunday after the first week back from break. Longer than I expected, but it was so worth it," Harry replied as he laughed slightly.

"No wonder they haven't said anything about it," Ginny said with a smirk on her face. "It also explains why they were talking about you so much this summer. They were trying to persuade Mum to let you come over for at least a day, but the idea of a Slytherin in our house scared her. The twins wanted to hurt her when they realized that she was listening to Ron's rude words instead of theirs, but I convinced

them to let it go. I have a feeling they're going to try and prove it all to her somehow." Ginny shrugged.

Harry shared a look with the other Slytherins in the compartment. They all shrugged in the same moment, none of them really caring what others thought of them as it was very normal to have that sort of bias on them.

"No big deal," Theo said as he settled down into his seat a bit better.

"We're all used to it," Draco added as a small smirk came to his face.

"Anyway," Harry said as he looked down at Ginny next to him, "what House do you think you'll be in?"

"Gryffindor," Ginny said automatically. "My whole family's been there."

"So you don't want to be the one that's different?" Harry asked as he cocked his head to the left.

"I do, and I know I'll make great friends in other Houses, even Slytherin," Ginny grinned cheekily as she said that, "but I want to be with my family. Besides, it all comes down to what the Sorting Hat thinks of me, right?"

"True," Harry admitted as he nodded. "Let me guess; you got the information about the Hat out of twins by threatening them?"

"Duh." Ginny smiled happily as her eyes twinkled with mischief.

Harry turned to Tracey and said in a stage whisper, "I think we've got another Slytherin on our hands." Ginny elbowed him in the back when she heard that, but Harry just turned around and smiled cheekily.

"He's not lying, Ginny," Draco said suddenly as the others laughed. "I can actually see some of your brothers in Slytherin." Everyone stared at him in disbelief. "What? The twins could be in Slytherin with the way they think, and the prefect – Percy, right? – is so ambitious that I'm wondering why he isn't a Slytherin."

Ginny was quiet for a moment before she said very quietly, "You're right, and most of the family knows it. The thing is, we're all brave and will fight when we have to."

"Why don't we just let the Sorting Hat decide?" Tracey suggested as the compartment stayed in an awkward silence for a little.

"I agree with that!" Theo exclaimed.

"Let's just enjoy the trip to Hogwarts," Hermione finished as she opened her journal again and activated it until a look from Daphne made her shut it again as she remembered Ginny didn't have one.

"Let's," the rest of the compartment agreed.

Harry smiled down at Ginny as she joined into the conversation as if she had always been there. He knew then and there that the group had another member, no matter what House she ended up in.

I hope I explained Ginny well enough for you all. The reason she's not as shy and doesn't have a crush is what I said: She's heard so many different things about Harry from her brothers - plus Slytherin from her family - that she doesn't know what to think. Because of this, she's decided to meet Harry and make her own decisions about him and his friends. I also hope I did her introduction justice. :-)

Craziest week ever this week. You're all pretty lucky this story is done as you wouldn't have gotten an update, most likely, if it wasn't. I barely had time for homework. Anyway, I've got 23 Chapters of the sequel done, and I'm headed towards the final stretch of Year Four; I just finished the Second Task. Basically, it's a fact now that the sequel will probably end up with more than 50 chapters, given the ideas I've got for Year Five, and I'm not even there yet! Just thought I'd give you an update, though.

I hope you enjoyed the chapter. Please, review and give me feedback on this chapter. I'm interested to see what you thought of it.

Posted: 1/9/10

Chapter Fifteen

Harry, Daphne, Tracey, Theo, and Blaise got out of the horse-less carriage and walked into the school. Walking quickly, they got into the Great Hall and to their seats at the Slytherin table before most of the other students. They wanted to be sitting by the new first years so that they could try to bring them into the group.

Pretty soon all of the students were seated and waiting for the first years. Harry had to hold in a snort as he heard Ron Weasley complaining about the lack of food from the other side of the Hall. Everyone had noticed that the boy was always hungry and ate everything he could.

Harry was about to comment on it to his friends when Professor McGonagall entered the room with the first years following her. She quickly led them up to the front of the Hall by the Head Table and where the Sorting Hat was waiting. Everyone turned to listen to the song as the Hat's mouth opened.

"I'm a thinking cap,
For I'm the Sorting Hat;
I am witnessing something,
And nothing can top that.
The Houses are uniting,
There is less fight,
And the Founders would be proud,
For all in the group are light.
The story is coming out,
The story that will change all,
That only one will hear,
But it must be believed or all will fall.
The Chosen Heir is coming;
He will prove himself properly,
And the Founders will all like him,
For he will hold himself proudly.
He could have been in Gryffindor,
Where the brave lay,
For they don't turn down a challenge,
To keep evil at bay;
He could have been in Hufflepuff,
Which is where loyalty is a must,
For without patient loyalty,

You cannot be just;
He could have been in Ravenclaw,
The home of wit,
Where learning is a boon,
For it helps more than a little bit;
He could have been in Slytherin,
The place of the cunning and sly,
For the ambitious will give their all,
And may even lie.
Now it is your turn,
For he has been placed,
So it's time to find,
Where your traits are based."

Everyone in the Hall was shocked beyond belief. No one had ever heard of the Chosen Heir. Not even Hermione, who Harry looked at almost immediately after the song, knew, or that was what Harry suspected from the look on her face.

What confused many people was the fact that the ghosts started whispering above them. Harry saw that many of the ghosts went to the Bloody Baron, the Slytherin House ghost, and started questioning him as if he knew all the answers. The Bloody Baron shook his head and said something that Harry couldn't catch.

It wasn't until the Bloody Baron was finally free of the other ghosts that Harry saw a hint at what the Hat had meant. Moments after he was finally left alone, the Bloody Baron looked right at Harry with a look that said he knew the Heir. The ghost then shared that look with many other Slytherins along the table, at least two from each year, which confused Harry.

Finally, Professor Dumbledore managed to calm down the Hall and allow McGonagall to do the Sorting. Harry didn't pay much attention except to hear the names of the new Slytherin first years: Laura Carmichael, Stephen Cornfoot, Kevin Entwhistle, Brandon Harper, Maya Pritchard, Isabella Stebbins, and Catherine Summers. He also tuned into the Sorting when it was Ginny's turn.

Ginny walked up to the Hat as the last student to get Sorted. She sat down and was on the stool for at least four minutes, which surprised some people as the Weasleys normally only took a few moments each. When the Hat finally opened his mouth again, he called out

"Gryffindor!" Ginny smiled slightly, but Harry could tell that she was very confused by what the Hat had said as she went to go sit down and be congratulated by her brothers. Harry made a mental note to ask her about it at a later time.

After the Sorting, food appeared on the table just like the year before. Harry and the others let the first years get their own food and eat for a bit before they started to talk with them.

"You're Maya, right?" Harry asked the girl sitting next to him as he turned to talk to her. She looked up at him in surprise for a moment before nodding. "Pureblood or Halfblood?"

"Pureblood," she replied as she realized this was a sort of interrogation.

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "Do you think that Purebloods are better than Halfbloods and Muggleborns?"

"My parents have always said that," Maya said slowly as she tried to figure Harry out.

"I didn't ask you that," Harry replied with a smile. "I asked if you think it. So, do you?"

Maya looked at Harry thoughtfully before looking at his friends. Harry turned to look with her and rolled his eyes as he saw Theo slipping a pea onto Daphne's plate and then Daphne hitting him upside the head when she saw it; Daphne didn't like peas at all, something Theo always took advantage of at meals. Harry wondered if Theo could ever act his own age.

"No, I don't," Maya said quietly, making Harry turn around to face her. "My brother, his best friend is the daughter of two Muggleborns, not that our parents know; they think that her parents are Purebloods because they act like it around my parents just so that their Natalie can have someone to play with her own age that's Magical. Graham, my younger brother, and she are like twins; neither of them is better than the other."

"Good," Harry said quietly as he smiled softly. Maya's head snapped up to look at him closely.

"Why did you ask?" Maya was suspicious now.

"You do know who I am, right?" Harry asked, curious to see if she actually recognized him without seeing the scar.

"Harry Potter," she stated.

"Have you heard any of the rumors about me since last year?" he questioned.

"No. I've mainly heard amazement that you're in Slytherin," Maya admitted as she looked down at her plate again.

"I've heard that one too many times to count," Harry laughed. "No, the one I'm talking about is the one where I'm combining the Houses." Maya's head flew up when she heard that. "I don't get the difference between Houses or blood. My friends here," Harry gestured to his four friends, "have come to agree with me, though the blood took a while for them."

"So... you asked because you want me to be in the group?" Maya questioned, picking up on his unspoken meaning quickly.

"Yes," Harry said simply. "I'm hoping to have most of the school over the stupid feud by the time I'm done with Hogwarts. If I can do it with each year, they'll continue it after I leave, and the next generation won't have the stupid prejudices or splits among them."

Maya had to shake herself physically to get out of her shock before asking, "How can I help?"

Harry smiled a mischievous and happy smile. "I need a leader among each House of the first years; I want you to be Slytherin's."

"Why me? Besides the fact that I don't believe that Purebloods are better, of course," Maya questioned with a raised eyebrow.

"When I saw you walking over here, you had the look of a leader round you," was Harry's simple answer. "The way you held yourself, it spoke leader on top of Pureblood. Slytherin will follow a Pureblood easier than a Halfblood; I'm the exception because I'm Harry Potter."

Maya nodded thoughtfully. "Basically you need a Pureblood leader who's willing to work to change the way we've been brought up to think." Harry nodded. "Okay... how am I supposed to do this?"

"Look at the first and second years of the other Houses," Harry replied as he pointed them out to her. She turned to look, and was shocked beyond belief.

"The second years are all talking to them!" she exclaimed as she watched Susan talking to a Hufflepuff boy, Hermione talking with Ginny, and Terry and Padma talking with a Ravenclaw boy. "What are they doing?" she then demanded as she turned back to face Harry, who was smiling slightly.

"The exact same thing I am, Maya," Harry replied evenly. "They're all finding the best people to be the leaders. If you look, the ones talking to find out are the leaders of my year. Susan Bones is Hufflepuff, both Terry Boot and Padma Patil share Ravenclaw as they work better together than alone, and Hermione Granger handles Gryffindor." Harry muttered the last part as he caught sight of Ron Weasley glaring at Hermione and Neville over his plate.

"Something wrong with Gryffindor?" Maya asked as she had caught the tone of Harry's voice.

"There's one boy, Ron Weasley, who's keeping most of his year away from the group, and they listen because he threatens them, or so Hermione tells me," Harry admitted as he turned away from Ron. "He feels betrayed and angry because I'm a Slytherin when I'm supposed to be a Gryffindor. I also believe he's a bit jealous because he thinks that my being famous makes life easy for me and that I get anything I want."

"Wow..." Maya whistled. "Ignorant and stupid?" she questioned.

"Seems like it," Harry muttered just loud enough for her to hear. "But I have to admit that he's good at strategy. He's not a complete idiot, he just doesn't use his brains in the way he should – that, and he lets what he grew up hearing rule his behavior." Harry smirked then and it was obvious that he was holding in a laugh.

"What's so funny?" Maya asked.

"I can't wait to see his reaction when he sees his sister is in our group along with his older brothers, the twins." Harry let out a snort of laughter when he finished explaining, and Maya copied him.

"So, what does being in your group entitle?" Maya finally asked once they both had eaten a bit more dinner.

"We do homework together and hang out together outside a lot," Harry informed the curious girl. "Mostly we're trying to show that the Houses and blood don't matter. What might happen is that we'll slowly grow more and more until we've got a large group together."

A thought passed through Harry's mind as he said that. The idea of journals throughout Hogwarts was very tempting if they could be made just the way he was thinking of. Harry began formulating a plan to write to Mr. Davis about the next day even as he was talking to Maya.

"So we'll basically be making a large group of friends between Houses and years?"

"Yeah." Harry nodded to emphasize. "What I'm expecting is that each year hangs out with their own year more than with the others, but all the years will hang out and help one another as well."

"And the leaders?" Maya questioned again.

"The leaders will all talk between Houses and years to make plans and to just show that years don't matter. What I'm expecting – and also hoping – is that when I leave Hogwarts, a single leader will be chosen from the four leaders in Seventh Year to be the one who keeps track of everything and is basically in charge. Sort of like the Head Boy and Head Girl being in charge of the Prefects." Maya nodded as Harry explained his hopes.

"You're the leader of the leaders until you leave Hogwarts, right?"

"I'm only saying that because everyone seems to look up to me and at me for guidance," Harry stated, not sounding at all as if he was bragging. "My year already thinks of me as the leader of the year except for Ron Weasley and those who follow him."

"I get it," Maya said with a smile. "That's something I like about you; you aren't trying to use your fame at all, and you're just being yourself. It's obvious to anyone with half a brain that you don't like your fame, and you're just doing what you think is right."

"I guess Ron doesn't have half a brain then," Harry laughed with a smile on his face as he watched Maya laugh with him.

Both of them went back to eating silently for a while as Harry watched his friends around the Hall, and Maya looked around as well while listening to the conversation of the first years. Susan was talking with all of the Hufflepuff first years along with Justin, Ernie, and Megan; Hannah was too shy to help her best friend very much. Over at the Ravenclaw table, Terry was continuously dragging Anthony into the conversation between Padma and the first years. Hermione, Neville, and Ginny were all making the first years a lot more comfortable at the Gryffindor table; all of them were laughing at something Ginny had said.

"So, are you in?" Harry asked Maya without looking at her as he continued to look between the other Houses and ignore his own friends at his table.

"I'm in," Maya replied when Harry finally looked over at her after a minute of silence; she wanted to say it straight to his face while looking him in the eye.

"Daphne, Tracey, Theo, Blaise," Harry called to his friends where Theo was sneaking carrots onto Blaise's plate, which had the same result as the peas on Daphne's. "We've got our Slytherin leader. This is Maya Pritchard."

"Pritchard," Blaise commented on slowly with a thoughtful look that matched the others as they all tried to place her.

"Pureblood with a younger brother," Tracey supplied from next to Harry. It wouldn't have surprised Harry if she had been listening to their conversation the entire time.

"Right," Theo said slowly as he nodded, the pieces falling into place.

"Believe half-bloods and Muggleborns are scum?" Daphne asked from across Tracey.

"Nope," Maya said matter-of-factly as the plates suddenly cleared and were filled up again with dessert.

"She'll do," Theo, Blaise, and Daphne said in sync.

"Thanks for agreeing with me," Harry drawled sarcastically. "And I thought only Tracey and I could talk at once," he added thoughtfully as he and Tracey traded smirks with each other before facing the others, an eyebrow raised each.

"Oh, shut up, Potter," Daphne shot back with a smile on her face that showed she wasn't angry.

Harry just laughed at it and began to pile his plate with treacle tart. He spent the rest of dinner listening to the conversations of his friends and the first years while watching them and the first and second years from the other Houses. The twins and their friends also caught his eye once or twice and smiled at him, to which he smiled back.

Dumbledore announced that the new DADA teacher was Gilderoy Lockhart, which made all of the Slytherin second years groan, even the girls. To them, they could tell that at least three-quarters of the girls in the school would have crushes, and they all knew that he was more into being famous than truly doing anything. Plus, Harry had told the others about the overlapping dates he had spotted while just flipping through them all, so they all knew he was a fraud.

Finally, Dumbledore released the group. Harry told Maya and the other first years to go with the fifth year Prefect that was calling them over, and then went to the entrance to the Great Hall and leaned against the wall outside of the doors. His Slytherin friends passed him, telling him they'd all wait up for him in the Common Room while he talked to the other leaders from his year.

Harry said a greeting to all of his year mates and those in the older years, which consisted of the Gryffindor Quidditch team and Cedric from Hufflepuff, while having Susan, Hermione, Terry, and Padma wait with him. None of them spoke besides greetings until all of the students had left the Hall, and most of the teachers had gone too. The four of Harry's friends acted as a barrier from Professor Lockhart as he tried to drag Harry away from his friends.

"So, what did you four get?" Harry asked when the Entrance Hall was finally empty and only a few professors could possibly be in the Great Hall.

"Ginny Weasley is the most obvious for Gryffindor," Hermione said as the others all looked at her to start. "I talked with the others, as did Neville, but she's just got this sort of aura around her that made it so that the others all wanted to talk with her. You also saw her on the train; she's strong and can take charge while still knowing how to have fun when she wants to."

Harry nodded as he thought about all of what Hermione said and agreed with every statement. That did describe Ginny, though he had noticed other things that she didn't about Ginny's leadership qualities; not that Harry was sharing.

"Padma, Terry?" Harry asked the two Ravenclaws, noticing that Susan didn't look upset about being last.

"It took a while," Terry said slowly, "but we finally recognized Bradley Martin as the best leader of the group."

"He's quiet," Padma added in quietly herself, "but he's got this strength to him that he showed when the other first years started arguing about the idea of Slytherins being okay."

"Yeah," Terry agreed. "When that happened, he suddenly looked up with eyes flashing and snapped at them all to be realistic and realize that the Slytherins in their year are just as young as they are and are in the same situation. It reminded me of how the Slytherins told us you convinced them about it all." Terry flashed Harry a smile that he returned.

"So..." Harry mused. "He's quiet, but he's quiet willing to calm others down and step in when he needs to. I think that shows that he watches and listens a lot, not that he's shy; he's a Slytherin with the mind of a Ravenclaw in a way. He uses traits that we Slytherins use to keep ourselves alive to learn as much as he can." The others all nodded thoughtfully at the idea. "He'll work."

"Well, I have to say that Matthew Summers is the perfect choice for Hufflepuff," Susan said without needing to be prompted. "The

moment the Sorting was over and the food was there, he began the conversation in a group of shy, scared first years and even turned to us second years, asking us about the school. He's a Half-blood, but his siblings are all younger, so he doesn't know much about the school.

"Most of the others were scared, but he had them talking and laughing within ten minutes. I talked to him once he got the others calm and he admitted that his parents left him with his three other siblings a lot, so he was used to making conversation and getting others to be busy." Susan had a smile on her face.

"Sounds perfect to me," Hermione said to the agreement of the Ravensclaws.

"I'll accept him," Harry agreed, and then he had to hold in a snort as the others all looked to him to find out about his choice.

"Maya Pritchard," he stated. "She's Pureblood and has a younger brother that's best friends with a witch that has two Muggleborn parents, but their parents don't know. I asked if she agreed with what her parents teach her, and she doesn't. When she asked why her besides not agreeing, I told her the truth: She walks with the air of a leader and a pureblood.

"It's different in Slytherin from your Houses," Harry continued slowly as the others took this all in. "Slytherin House won't follow anyone but a Pureblood in all cases but me as I'm Harry Potter, so my being a Half-blood means nothing to them. Susan told us Matthew is a Half-blood, and I'm willing to bet that Bradley is too." Harry didn't even wait for a response before he continued. "Ginny is a Pureblood, but she's also a Weasley, which makes a difference.

"Slytherins will only listen to a Pureblood, but the other Houses will listen to any, though the Half-bloods and Purebloods will be better as they already know about this world and can help their classmates." Harry took a deep breath. "Basically, Maya is the best choice even without my talking to the others. Plus, she got the others listening to her while we all ate dessert, and they were all actually thinking about the idea when we were done."

"Wow..." Susan muttered with the others nodding their agreement. "She actually got the Slytherins to consider the idea... You, I can

understand, Harry. You just have this aura about you that makes everyone want to listen to you. That she'll probably have them in our group by the end of tomorrow, which is kind of amazing."

Harry just smiled before telling the others they all did a good job choosing. They all said goodnight, and Harry headed down one of the entrances to the dungeons while Susan entered another; the other three headed upstairs to their respective towers.

Walking the familiar path to the Common Room, Harry had to smile lightly. Everything about Hogwarts made him think home; from the Dorms to the classes to the friends he had there. The Davis house had become a second home for him, but he still thought of Hogwarts as his true home.

"Parselmouth," Harry said aloud when he got to the entrance to the Common Room, not understanding why it was the password as he hadn't had the time to ask one of the Prefects or his friends before he spoke to the others. He made a mental note to ask the others later.

"Hey guys," he called as he flopped onto the couch next to Tracey. "We've got good leaders for all of the Houses; they'll do well, I think."

"Great," Daphne said for the four of them.

"Let's go to bed, then," Theo stated as he fought back a yawn and stood up, stretching. Daphne and Blaise followed suit, but Tracey felt Harry's hand lightly on her arm and knew from the look in his eyes that he wanted to talk.

"You three go," she said softly. "Harry and I need to talk about something."

The other three looked at them curiously but nodded and said their goodnights before heading to their Dorms, all three of them used to the sudden conversations between the two almost-siblings.

"I've got an idea that I want to pass by you before I write to your father," Harry told Tracey softly.

"Oh?" she questioned while her eyes asked the true question.

"Journals," he stated, knowing she'd catch on quicker than the others would have.

"Give them all journals..." she muttered under her breath as her eyes widened.

"Black for all of them, the leaders having a lining around the edges in their House colors, one on the front and the other on the back," Harry elaborated.

"And for those of you who have a colored journal?" she questioned, though Harry knew she liked the idea.

"If they're like mine and a color of the House, use the other for the lining, and use both if it isn't," he stated as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"How would it work, though?" Tracey's eyes were full of confusion on how it would work.

"We'd change a lot of things about our journals," Harry said slowly as he looked Tracey in the eyes and saw that she trusted him and would listen to his ideas. "Those with black journals won't be able to use the way we talk now; they'll only be able to talk in groups that anyone can join until they reach the maximum size; I was thinking six people with an extra as the Host, or the one who originally opened it by inviting at least one other person.

"There would be different ways to activate different settings," he continued as the plan he had begun to form at dinner suddenly became a full idea that seemed perfect. "Our way of holding and activating would work only for the colored journals, and it would look like it does now with only colored journals in the conversation. Taping it once would activate a new one that has the groups, and taping it twice would be only for Leaders so that we can keep in contact."

"That might just work," Tracey said slowly as she thought about it, "but there needs to be more guidelines. Like, the Leaders can have a group conversation with their entire year, and not just their own House, but all of them. The Leader of the Leaders, which is you, Harry," Harry scowled at that a little, though he knew it was a true,

and Tracey had to hold in a giggle as she continued, "should be able to bring everyone into a conversation."

"That works..." Harry admitted slowly as he saw the merit. "Also, besides the talking to writing, the blacks only have whatever basic stuff your dad added into this that we still don't know about. Anything we add as an extra feature stays with the colored journals." Tracey nodded in agreement.

"Why don't we write a letter to Daddy tomorrow during breakfast and send it off with Hedwig so that he can figure out the charms and work on the pile of black journals that we're sure to need?" Tracey suggested after a bit of silence. "We'll tell him to make six or seven blacks with the House color linings so that we'll have enough to cover it all until we leave Hogwarts. When he's got it all figured out, we'll send him all of the colored ones, and he can add the linings and charms to them.

"When it's all done, we'll pass them out," Tracey finished.

"Good idea, except for one thing," Harry stated, and Tracey looked up at him in confusion. "We need a charm on the journals so that anyone who doesn't own one or isn't related to the person – we have to add that so that parents will know that they really are talking to friends and so that younger siblings will know about it early – can't tell what they are. If we use them in class or while we're supposed to be working in the library or something, the teachers will find out."

Tracey looked up at Harry in worry, but she was quickly relieved by the thoughtful look on his face.

"There's probably a charm that can be used to make it so that anyone not related or owning a journal will see it as homework, notes, a journal or diary, a letter home, or something like that," Harry said thoughtfully.

"Daddy probably knows one," Tracey agreed. "Well, we'll just have to include all of this in the letter we write in the morning. It's an excellent idea, though, Harry."

"Thanks," Harry replied with a small smile as he blushed lightly. "When I was talking to Maya, the idea of it just popped up in my head."

"We'll get started on it right away," Tracey stated with a small smile to match Harry's. "But for right now, I believe we should get some sleep; we have classes in the morning."

Harry smiled and wished Tracey, the girl who was basically his twin sister in everything but blood, a goodnight. When he got to his dorm, he found all the other boys still unpacking and shook his head as he joined them and finished unpacking at the same time as the others, much to their dismay as he was faster and neater than any of them. He was the first into bed, and he fell asleep thinking about the journals and how much good the ideas he and Tracey had come up with would do.

...

Dear Diary,

I'm finally a first year at Hogwarts! My Sorting took forever, but I was finally Sorted into Gryffindor with my brothers, much to my relief. The Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin! Slytherin might not be a bad House, especially with Harry Potter there, but my brothers – and probably my parents – wouldn't speak to me again.

The writer paused to think about what to write next, and was shocked as the ink from the quill got sucked into the little black diary with the name Tom Riddle on the back. Even more shocking, the diary began writing back.

Hello, my name is Tom Riddle. What's your name?

Kill me if you wish as I'm expecting comments on much of this chapter, especially the end, but that little three paragraph scene is VERY important to the plot. All I ask is that you're not too hard on me for how good the Song was. It's my own, no one else's, and writing these songs is HARD. Especially when you take forever to get into the groove of writing poems. Anything else, well, just comment in a review. ;-)

Oh, I give credit to the name Maya Pritchard to the author Whydoyouneedtoknow who writes on . My character is completely different, even a different family history, but she created the name, so I give her the credit for it. I also highly recommend her stories

beginning with Living With Danger through Facing Danger; she's created an entire universe for herself including AUs of it!

I'm so glad that everyone who commented on Ginny seemed to approve of her and how I brought her in. That brought a smile to my face. :)

Please, leave a review on anything you wish. I enjoy anything from just a "Good job," to constructive criticism. All I ask is not to be rude in the review; even stating a fact that you don't like my story is just fine. :)

Posted: 1/16/11

Chapter Sixteen

Harry woke up first in the second year boys' dorm, which wasn't unusual. Unfortunately for Theo and Blaise, Harry woke them up once he was dressed and ready to go to breakfast. He had an idea that the first years would be lost, so he wanted to go help them out for the first day.

Theo and Blaise slowly got ready while Harry went into the Common Room. Tracey was already there with her journal in her lap and open. He walked up behind her and put his arms on the couch behind her head and read over her shoulder.

Hermione: I wonder what classes we have first today. What books do I need to bring with me? Should I just bring them all so that I have them with me so that I can't be late?

Tracey: Hermione, calm down. You'll have plenty of time to go get your books.

Hermione: Are you sure?

Susan: We're all sure, Hermione. Just calm down!

Hermione: I'm just not sure. I mean, what if they don't hand out the schedules until just before class starts? We won't have time to go get our books then, and the dorms are all the way on the seventh floor, which means it'll take at least ten minutes to get them and start heading back down to the room.

Harry, who was getting tired of Hermione's worrying, lightly pulled on the pencil in Tracey's hand until she let go so that he could write.

Harry: Hermione! It'll be FINE! The teachers will give us our schedules at least a good twenty minutes before classes start, and it'll probably be closer to half an hour. We'll get our books and be in class on time. You don't have to worry about it!

Hermione: Are you sure...?

Harry: Yes. Now, calm down and go down to breakfast. Theo, Blaise, and Daphne are down, so we're just going to wait for the first years and then go.

Tracey: The first years are coming, too.

Harry: See you all in the Hall.

Tracey closed her journal after claiming her pencil back from Harry as he stood up from his seat next to her, which was where he had moved to while writing to calm Hermione down. Daphne and Maya were talking quietly with the other Slytherin girls all whispering back and forth. Theo and Blaise were still half asleep as they led the first year boys into the Common Room.

"If you seven are willing to follow us, we'll take you to the Great Hall for breakfast," Harry called as Tracey stood up next to him with a light smile on her face.

"Come on Isa, Laura, Catherine," Maya called. "Hey, Brandon, Steven, Kevin, you coming?"

"Yeah, yeah, we're coming!" one of the boys called back as he flipped his long, light brown hair out of his hazel eyes. Harry thought he was Kevin Entwhistle, but it would take him a day or so to get the names of all the first years.

"Theo, Blaise, wake up!" Daphne called from her position by Maya with a smirk on her face.

"Oh, shut up, Daphne," Theo snapped. He was never in a good mood early in the morning. It would be better after they got some food into him.

"Guys, stop," Tracey said calmly from beside Harry.

Harry rolled his eyes at the bickering, and turned to the entrance. He waved everyone to follow him over his shoulder, making sure to let them all know he was leaving. A smile crossed his face when he heard them all trying to catch up to him as he headed to the Hall.

When they all got to the Great Hall, all twelve of them sat together. Harry made sure to sit with his back to the wall so that he could see his friends at the other Houses. He also made sure that Maya sat next to him.

Next to Harry, Tracey was writing in her journal again. A quick glance told him that Hermione, Susan, Terry, Fred, George, and Draco were all on along with Tracey. The twins and Draco were probably still in their dorms, but the other three were at their tables with the other first years.

Harry smiled as he realized his friends must have had the same idea as he did and led the first years to the Great Hall so that they didn't get lost. It was a good feeling to know that his friends all were kind enough to help out the newest additions to the school, and possibly the group.

Harry quickly stole Tracey's pencil and jotted a quick question down into the journal, which was replied to. Once he had seen the reply, Harry flashed Tracey a smile and returned her pencil. The exchange took all of thirty seconds and didn't look out of place at all.

"Hey Maya," Harry called quietly as he turned to face the first year.

"Yeah?" she asked, turning to face Harry.

"You see the first years sitting next to a second year and facing us?" Harry questioned as he gestured to the other tables. When he saw Maya nod out of the corner of his eye, he continued. "The first years facing us are the leaders of the other Houses."

"Who are they?" Maya asked as she studied them carefully. Harry knew just by watching her that she'd be taking in every detail she could about them.

"Over by Padma Patil, one of the Ravenclaw leaders from my year along with the boy next to her, Terry Boot, you have Bradley Martin," Harry informed her as he took in the boy's long, light-brown hair that went down to his shoulders. "From what they both told me last night, he's a half-blood that's quiet but knows how to take charge and calm others down."

Maya nodded appreciatively. "Sounds like a Slytherin-like leader," she mused. "He listens, pays attention, and then acts. Probably going to be a great leader and an excellent guy to work with," she added.

"I'm glad you approve," Harry said with a hint of sarcasm in his voice that was offset by the slight lift of one side of his mouth. "Hufflepuff has Matthew Summers, another half-blood. Susan Bones told me that the moment the food was out, he had the others in conversation, calmed down, and was asking the second years about the school within ten minutes."

A low whistle was heard from Maya as Harry chanced a glance at the strawberry-blond boy who just so happened to catch Harry's eye at that moment with his light blue eyes before flashing Harry a smile and turning to talk to Susan about something.

"You've probably heard of Gryffindor's leader, but then again, who hasn't heard of the last name?" Harry smirked as he turned to face those in robes lined with red. "Ginny Weasley," Harry stated matter-of-factly.

"Okay, I'll bite," Maya said slowly as she turned to face Ginny, "why her?"

"Hermione claims she's a natural leader," Harry replied with a shrug as he watched the redhead eat a bite of scrambled eggs. "Turns out Neville even agreed that Ginny just has this aura around her that gets people talking to her. It's kind of hard to disagree as she was in my compartment on the train; she knows how to have fun, but she can also take control. That girl scares the twins; that has to mean something."

Maya's eyes widened for a moment at the mention of Ginny scaring the twins before she smirked to match Harry's.

"I like this girl already, and I haven't even talked to her," Maya said in an awed voice. "The Weasley twins are known for their pranks," she explained after a few moments. "If anyone can actually scare those two, that person earns respect."

"Like me, then?" Harry questioned with a larger smirk on his face.

"Like you," Maya agreed, having heard about the Silver/Emerald prank in the Common Room the night before.

"Well, why don't you go back to convincing the others?" Harry suggested. "In your first class, talk to the other first years; we found

that having one Slytherin and one person from another House was the best way to make friends and merge the Houses. Try switching partners in each class you have with a House until you've all met one another; that's when you can find your favorite and make friends, though I'm kind of hoping the leaders will work together to show unity between them," Harry admitted.

"Thanks for the ideas; I think I'll use them all, including the leaders working together part," Maya replied with a small smile after thinking it over for a few moments. With that, Maya turned to one of the Slytherin boys, who Harry was almost certain was Stephen Cornfoot.

Piling sausage, eggs, bacon, and toast onto his plate, Harry began eating his breakfast. When he was halfway through, he turned to Tracey, who was eating with her left hand and writing with her right.

"Trace?" Harry asked to get her attention.

"Yeah?" she replied, looking up from her journal and making sure to remove her pencil to give them privacy.

"We need to write that letter to your father before Snape comes down and starts handing out schedules," Harry reminded her.

"Right," Tracey said with a nod before writing another message and signing off, though she didn't close her journal. "Should I write the letter with you telling me what to say?" she questioned, her pencil still on the right flap to write the letter to her father.

"Yeah," Harry replied, liking that idea.

For the next fifteen minutes, the pair worked together to write a letter to Tracey's father, both eating while they did it. With their ideas written down, they shared a slight smile before they took turns signing the bottom of the letter and Tracey used her wand to remove the parchment from the middle of her journal and roll it up. Tying it tightly, both nodded to one another, knowing that the response would tell them if her father could make the changes to the journals if they sent them to him.

Just as they finished tying it up, Hedwig flew into the Great Hall along with a handful of other owls that hadn't entered with the rest of the group. Both pleasantly surprised, Harry offered her a piece of

bacon while Tracey attached the letter to her leg. The snowy owl nipped a finger on both before soaring out of the Hall to deliver the letter.

"That saves us a trip to the owlry," Harry commented dryly as he watched his owl fly out of the entrance made for owls.

"That it does," Tracey agreed before looking up the table and seeing Professor Snape stalking down it, tossing schedules at the first years, though they each landed perfectly in front of each student.

When Harry got his schedule, he was relieved to see that they had a break before Transfiguration that morning. Double Herbology and then History of Magic took over the afternoon, which had Harry holding in a groan; he hated History of Magic with a passion, though he usually used it to get in some reading.

"Thank Merlin we have a break before Transfiguration," Theo muttered quietly. Harry and the other three had to hold in a snicker as they all knew it was Theo's worst subject while Charms was his best.

"I'm just glad we don't have DADA with that idiot up there until tomorrow," Harry stated darkly as he gestured towards the Head Table and Gilderoy Lockhart.

"With you on that one," the others all agreed, almost in one voice. They all went back to eating the last of their breakfast, falling silent.

"Let's go grab our books for our classes and spend our break out in the courtyard," Tracey suggested after Theo had finally taken his last bite of breakfast while staring at his schedule darkly, obviously still peeved by the Transfiguration later that morning.

"Sure," Daphne agreed for all of them, though Harry didn't answer only because he had turned to face Maya and got her attention.

"Maya, grab the other first years and come with us; we'll lead you back to the Common Room and one of us will take you to –" Harry quickly paused to look at her schedule on the table in front of her – "Transfiguration."

"Thanks," Maya replied before turning to her fellow first years and telling them the plan. After that, Harry and the others got up and led the first years to the entrance to the dungeons before anyone began speaking.

"Do you all see that symbol up there?" Harry asked, gesturing to a little symbol of a snake that was near the ceiling and not very obvious unless a person was looking for it. "Well, that's how we Slytherins find our Common Room without getting lost," he continued when they all nodded.

"Look to see which side of the hall it's on at every corner; that tells you if you turn left or right. When you get to the Common Room, there's a small one on the ceiling so that no one from another House will notice it."

"Smart," one of the girls, Laura Carmichael, commented.

"We're Slytherins," Maya stated with a raised eyebrow. "You do know that means we're smart and think of things like that, right?"

"Well, duh," Laura drawled as she flipped her dark-brown hair out of her hazel eyes to look Maya right in her light-green eyes.

"Good," Maya replied as she slid a lock of black hair away from her face.

The group fell silent as the first years found all of the little snakes as they walked down the hall after Harry, his friends following the first years. It wasn't until Harry had opened the entrance and watched the first year boys enter their room and quickly found his dragonhide bag, which had all of his books and supplies shrunk into it, that he spoke.

"Hey guys?" Harry called to Blaise, Theo, Daphne, and Tracey as the five of them waited for the first years to gather their supplies together.

"Yeah?" Daphne replied for all of them.

"What in the world does 'Parselmouth' mean?" he asked, his face showing the confusion he felt, which reminded the others that he really didn't know much about the Wizarding World.

"A person who can talk to and understand snakes," Tracey informed Harry quietly from beside him.

Harry faced the others, a look of surprise slowly covering his face as realization kicked in. He was just about to ask another question about it when footsteps rushing down the halls to both dorms stated the return of the first years.

His face changing from surprised to blank in an instant, Harry faced the first years as if he hadn't just been surprised out of his mind, though he truly had been. The way Tracey had made him feel that being a Parselmouth was rare and possibly a bad thing, which didn't help him at all.

As Harry and his friends led the seven scared first year Slytherins to Transfiguration, Harry's thoughts were spinning out of control. Finding out what a Parselmouth was had brought back a memory from a couple of months before he had found out he was a wizard.

His relatives had been forced to take him along to the zoo with his cousin, Dudley, and Dudley's friend. While there, Harry had talked to a boa constrictor, freed it, and heard the snake thank him.

Thinking back on it, Harry realized that he had understood the snake and the snake had understood him, which probably meant he was a Parselmouth, which frightened him greatly, if Tracey's tone of voice was anything to go by.

"This is the Transfiguration classroom," Theo stated, which pulled Harry out of his thoughts and back to what he was doing.

"Thanks," Brandon Harper said softly. The others all nodded in agreement, which just proved that, no matter how hard they tried to hide it, they were definitely frightened.

"No problem," Harry replied with a small smile that reassured the others.

"As long as you behave and listen to Professor McGonagall, you'll do fine," Daphne said to reassure the nervous first years.

"Professor McGonagall looks like a stern teacher, but she's really an excellent one who will teach you a lot if you listen and try to learn," Blaise added.

"The only reason she's stern is because if something goes wrong in Transfiguration, a lot can go wrong," Harry informed them. "Charms accidents are a bit easier to fix than Transfiguration ones, which is why you should just listen to her, behave, and follow instructions."

"I'd think you all were trying to gain favor with me before your class later this morning if I didn't know that all of you were being serious, didn't know I'm here, and you're just trying to help your fellow Slytherins," the voice of Professor McGonagall said from behind the five second years, who had been standing with their backs to the classroom door.

"Of course not, Professor," Harry said softly as they all turned around to see the only slightly-imposing figure of Professor McGonagall looking down at them with lips obviously fighting a smile.

"Will I be seeing more of last year's actions this year?" she asked, one eyebrow raised.

"It's already begun, Professor," Harry replied with a slightly smug smile. Around him, only Tracey understood what Professor McGonagall was asking him.

"Well, well, this is definitely proving to be an interesting seven years for sure," the normally-stern professor commented with a slight smile as she gave into the urge.

"I try," Harry replied, this time not masking the smugness in his voice. "Besides," Harry added in a more serious voice, "I want this to continue well past my graduation, so I have to work with them now, before the stupid rivalry and bias kicks in."

"True, true," Professor McGonagall agreed. "Well, since you've given my students their advice, I think I'll take them now and introduce them to the actual subject." Her eyebrow was still raised, as if daring the second years to contradict her.

"Of course," Daphne replied as the second years moved out of the way so that the first years could enter the room, all five of them giving the first years reassuring smiles.

"I'll see you five along with your counterparts in about an hour," the professor added before closing the door just as the bell went around the building, signaling the beginning of the first class of the year.

Harry and his friends all shared smiles, amused by what had just occurred. Then, the five of them headed outside to the grounds and found a nice spot under a tree close to the school. Once all of them were relaxed and either laying on their backs or sitting against the tree, Harry brought up the conversation from before.

"So... is being a Parselmouth a bad thing or something?" he asked, his mind trying to figure it out before he mentioned the boa incident.

"Not a bad thing, per say..." Daphne replied slowly, trying to figure out how to reply, though Harry guessed she was trying to figure out why he was asking.

"Parseltongue, which is the language, is usually a sign of a Dark Wizard," Theo threw out from his position on the floor with his eyes closed.

Harry closed his eyes tightly so that they wouldn't give away his emotions. His friends were basically saying that because he could understand and speak snake, he was a Dark Wizard.

"Why are you so curious, Harry?" Tracey asked softly from beside him, her back against the tree.

"No reason," Harry managed to reply through a choked throat as he fought back his emotions at what he was hearing.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Tracey exclaimed, catching the attention of the others, who hadn't heard the last exchange between the pair.

Keeping his eyes shut tightly, Harry replied in a tight voice, "It's nothing."

"Nothing my arse!" Daphne exclaimed, the least likely on in the group to curse, which surprised Harry even though he didn't react. "Something's wrong and you're going to tell us!"

"You want to know what's wrong?" Harry asked darkly as his eyes flashed open and the other four could see his emerald eyes shining darkly. "My best friends tell me that being a Parselmouth is a sign of a Dark Wizard; that's what's bloody wrong!"

"Harry...?" Tracey asked softly, her voice showing her fear and confusion. It calmed Harry down some as he realized he was scaring his friends immensely on top of confusing them.

"A few months before I got my Hogwarts letter, I was talking to a boa constrictor in a zoo," Harry admitted softly, his body slumping against the tree as the anger left him.

"Bloody hell," Blaise muttered, pretty much summing it up.

"Harry," Tracey said softly as he closed his eyes again, "being a Parselmouth doesn't make you automatically a Dark Wizard."

"She's right you know," a voice said from beside the group, making all of them turn to see Ginny standing there, her eyes on Harry.

"What are you doing here?" Harry asked in a defeated voice as his eyes closed again. Even though he knew it probably sounded rude, he just didn't have the energy to say anything else.

"I've got a break this hour and saw you all down here; I thought I'd come see what you were up to," Ginny replied.

"You heard, then?" Daphne asked as Harry continued to stare at the inside of his eyelids, barely moving.

"Yeah, I heard, and I agree with Tracey. You're not a Dark Wizard, Harry."

"How do you know?" Harry asked with a bit of anger in his voice as he looked up at the redhead again, his emerald eyes shining with fear, anxiousness, hope, worry, and anger.

"Because I, like everyone in your group of friends, met the real you, and you're not at all evil," Ginny replied, her brown eyes staring right into Harry's as if reading his soul and trying to make him understand in the same look.

"Tell that to your brother," Harry and Theo muttered in the same breath, making Ginny laugh shortly.

"Trust me, I tried when I got to the Common Room and he asked where I had sat on the train. Turns out Dean and Seamus saw me in your compartment and told my idiot brother; he went off the handle at me. Let's just say he'll have a hard time sitting for a few days." The mischievous smile and evil glint in her eyes brought a slight smile to Harry's face; the rest of the group burst out laughing.

"Harry, she's right, you know," Daphne finally said after the group was done laughing. "Remember what the Sorting Hat said that day in Dumbledore's office? You have the traits to fit into any House, which includes Gryffindor."

"And you're bringing the Houses together!" Blaise added. "No Dark Wizard would be trying to do that. Hell, no normal Slytherin would be trying to do that!"

"You might be a Slytherin, Harry, but you've got the mind of a Ravenclaw as well as a Slytherin, and you've got the heart of a Gryffindor and a Hufflepuff," Tracey said softly, being the only one of the group who could say that with conviction as she knew Harry the best.

Harry felt touched by what all five of them were saying. He did, in fact, remember the Sorting Hat saying he could have been in any House, but by being in Slytherin he was doing the most good. Thinking about it, he also realized that Tracey wasn't joking, as the look in her eyes confirmed. She truly did believe that he had a bit of all the Houses in him.

"Thank you," Harry whispered through a choked voice as he looked down at the ground, not even looking up when he heard Ginny sit down in front of him.

"There's nothing to thank us for, Harry," she said as she lifted his head up with a finger under his chin. "We were only stating the truth, which you couldn't see for some reason."

Everyone fell silent as the wind blew the leaves around in the tree above them. Harry was trying to figure out how to ask his next question without giving anything away to Ginny.

"How does Parseltongue relate to Slytherin?" Harry finally asked, breaking the silence. It was the easiest way to find out why the password was Parselmouth without Ginny realizing it was their password.

"Slytherin was a Parselmouth," Theo replied immediately as if he had been expecting the question, which Harry guessed all of his Slytherin friends probably had seen as they knew he had only asked because it was the password.

"Oh..." he muttered. "Anyone else I might know been a Parselmouth?" Everyone fell silent, and Harry looked up to see all five of his friends – including Ginny, which worried him more than the silence – sharing looks as if trying to decide if they should tell him.

"The Dark Lord," Blaise finally admitted slowly.

"Voldemort was a Parselmouth?" Harry asked in disbelief as an idea began to form in his mind, but he couldn't reach it to figure out what his mind was trying to tell him.

"Yes," Theo agreed while Ginny shivered ever so slightly at the sound of the name.

"Then..." Harry paused as he realized what his mind had been trying to tell him. "Then, could it be possible that my speaking Parseltongue might just be from the fact that Voldemort's Killing Curse reflected back on him instead of killing me? I mean... maybe something happened that night and I got the ability from him."

"You might be right," Blaise said with a thoughtful look that matched the ones the other four were wearing, though only Blaise said a word. "It's certainly possible, though very few people might be able

to confirm it, and I don't think you want this ability getting out, so we might have to wait a while before finding out."

"True," Harry admitted as he realized Blaise was right about him not wanting others to know about his ability. "I was mainly just throwing out the idea."

"It was a good one, Harry," Ginny said with a slight smile. "I can see why all five of you are in Slytherin." The look on Ginny's face, which had gone from smiling to a slight grimace, reminded Harry of his mental note from the night before.

"Hey, Ginny, why did you look so confused after you got Sorted last night?"

Ginny's eyes got a bit darker as she contemplated her answer. The rest of the group looked between Harry and Ginny, none of them knowing what to say as none of them had noticed that last night.

"The Sorting Hat was trying to decide between Slytherin and Gryffindor for me," she finally admitted. "He was pushing towards Slytherin, but Gryffindor is where my family is, and I know I'll fit in here, even if the Sorting Hat thought Slytherin was more for me."

"You chose the place you wanted to be, which is a whole lot better than being forced into a House like most of us," Harry said softly, truly meaning what he was saying.

"Besides, at least you weren't like Harry," Theo said with a smirk on his face that told everyone that he had an annoying thought on his mind.

"And what do you mean by that, Theodore?" Harry asked sharply, though the whole group knew he was joking around.

"All I mean is that you could have been in any House, which must have made it hard for the Sorting Hat to Sort you," Theo replied with a voice that showed he was trying to sound innocent.

"Right," Daphne drawled. Daphne looked at Harry, who had suddenly become deep in thought, when he didn't say anything in retaliation to Theo. "Harry?"

"Huh? Oh, sorry, something just came to my mind, but it's gone now," he replied.

The others all shrugged except for Tracey, who just let Harry have his own thoughts. Harry was relieved by it because he didn't want his friends to realize what he had: The Sorting Hat had claimed that the "Chosen Heir" could have been in any House, just like him.

This chapter is important in ways that aren't quite obvious yet. If anyone can figure it out, maybe I'll give you a sneak peek of something later on in the story, possibly even of your choice. ;-)
There are a few things hidden in here, but I'm mainly looking for one specific one.

Otherwise, this is just a normal chapter. The NEXT one, on the other hand... *Grins mischievously* Oh man did I have fun with probably the largest coincidence in the entire series so far. :D

I hope you enjoyed the chapter, and please leave a review? :)

By the way, if anyone is curious to see where I am in the second story, I put a little thing on my profile that I'll keep updating as I write to say what chapter I'm on and what major event from the books I just wrote. Fifth year I'll probably write the month more than anything, but for now, this is how I'm doing it. This way, you'll be able to tell when the sequel is coming close to the end.

Posted: 1/23/11

Chapter Seventeen

After Transfiguration, which was mainly just review from the year before, Harry was found at the Hufflepuff table along with Maya, Ginny, Hermione, Terry, Padma, Matthew Summers, and Bradley Martin. The nine of them were talking about a lot of random things as well as some important things.

"By the way, Tracey and I owled her father today," Harry mentioned suddenly, catching the attention of the four other second years. "I had an idea that she helped me solidify. He'll need the books back sometime in the future to complete it, but there will be a bunch of new ones by the time we're done."

"Really?" Hermione asked with interest, the others also looking at Harry curiously.

"Yup," Harry replied as he took a bite of a sandwich, almost completely ignoring the confused looks of the first year leaders. "You four will understand when it's all ready; don't worry about it for now." The first years nodded in understanding, though Harry saw something in Ginny's eyes that had him a bit confused as he couldn't explain what it was.

After a bit more random chatter, Hermione brought up something that had Harry groaning, Terry mimicking him moments later.

"DADA is going to be such an excellent class!" she exclaimed as she looked at her schedule and saw that she had it the next day after lunch.

"That's going to be the worst class of the year," Harry muttered quietly, but just loud enough for Hermione to hear him.

"Why is that?" she asked dangerously, which would have stopped most people, but Harry wasn't most people.

"Lockhart is an idiot and a fraud," he stated matter-of-factly. "He probably just wrote those books to make himself look good. The only thing he cares about is his image, which means how famous he is. We'll probably learn more by skipping his class and using it to read in the library than by going to it."

"How can you say that?" Hermione yelled quietly, which was lucky as she might have turned a few heads if it had been much louder.

"Have you cross-referenced the dates in the books with one another?" Harry questioned calmly. "I was only skimming while we were in the bookstore and I saw that a bunch of them overlapped."

"Prove it," Hermione challenged with narrowed eyes. Harry saw the rest of the group leaning away from her slightly, the glare in her eyes and the venom in her voice scaring them.

"Sure," Harry replied as he reached into his dragonhide bag and pulled out two random books from Lockhart's collection, a few colored tabs sticking out of each.

Opening both books to the red tabs, he turned them so that Hermione could see the pages and pointed out the dates stated in the books. As he saw that she didn't believe him correctly as it could have been a misunderstanding, he found another two books that had red tabs in them and pointed out the dates. When he saw her relenting, Harry added a couple of ones with blue tabs and showed her the overlapping dates between them.

"I give in; you're right about this one, Harry," Hermione finally admitted as Harry closed his books and packed them away again.

"So wait... our Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher is a fraud?" Bradley asked in disbelief, showing his Ravenclaw side.

"Yup," Harry replied with a small smile. "It's all in the books, his looks, his arrogance, and just his personality and attitude."

"Wow..." Matthew muttered softly.

"Harry, I have an idea..." Maya began slowly, continuing after getting a nod from him. "Why doesn't one of us write a note in an unrecognizable handwriting and then make copies of it to pass around to our years?"

"And by dinner tonight, the entire school will know," Harry finished with a touch of awe in his voice at the excellent idea from his Housemate. "See why I chose her?" Harry asked the others as he turned to them.

"Oh yeah," Susan replied for all of the second years as they all looked at Maya in amazement, making the Slytherin's cheeks get a tinge of pink.

"One question, though," Ginny stated suddenly, snapping all the others out of their stupor to look at her. "How in the world are we going to do it?"

"Slytherin won't be too hard for me," Harry said with conviction. "I just need Draco to slip the notes to his friends while talking to them, which won't be hard. The rest of my group already knows about him."

"That's good for you, but how do we get the notes out without everyone knowing they're from us?" Ginny asked again impatiently. "If anyone sees us, anyone at all, we'll get into trouble."

"First and foremost, we need to figure out how to write the notes so that it doesn't look like any of us wrote them," Hermione stated as she took out her journal to write notes in with the pencil in it.

Seeing the journal, Harry had an idea. "Hey Padma?"

"Yes Harry?" the Ravenclaw asked after swallowing a gulp of pumpkin juice.

"Would your sister be willing to help us without telling anyone if it means she can spread gossip after classes?" he questioned.

"She'll do anything for gossip," Padma replied with a grin as she saw how much her twin sister, Parvati, could help.

"I've got an idea, but you can't tell her that any of us are involved." Padma and the others raised an eyebrow at that. "The books can pick up on the spoken word of a family member, but it looks like it's from a computer, which is a muggle thing. If Parvati can say something you write on a piece of parchment aloud, it'll appear in the books and we can use it."

Padma's eyes went wide along with the other second years as they realized what he was saying while the others look so confused that Harry was holding back a laugh.

"I promise, you four will understand what all of this means within a month, okay?" The four all nodded, though none of them look happy.

Padma quickly wrote something on a piece of spare parchment before hurrying over to her twin with her journal activated and ready to pick up on the conversation. Harry and the others watched as Padma pleaded with her sister before Parvati gave in, accepted the parchment, and said it aloud, her eyes widening as she realized what she had just said. After a few more words were exchanged, Padma's face stern, Padma hurried back to the Hufflepuff table and slid her bronze-colored journal to Harry, whose wand was in his hand.

Harry slid the tip of his wand along the top of the pad of paper in the middle of the journal, making it a scroll that was separated from the journal. Handing Padma back her journal with a smile of thanks, Harry unrolled the scroll and found the part they needed.

The Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, Professor Gilderoy Lockhart, is a fraud. Everything he's said, written, and done is completely wrong. He only cares about his image and how famous he is.

Using his wand to cut out that portion of the parchment, Harry appreciated the fact that it didn't look like anyone had written it at all.

"What did you say to her to get her to do it?" Ginny asked Padma as Harry worked on making enough copies of the small slip of paper to give each first and second year one along with extras for proof for the older kids.

"First I told her it was gossip and that she'd be able to spread it after she found copies of something written on small slips of parchment. Then I had to tell her that she couldn't tell anyone that I had asked her for it, not even Lavender. We had a bit of a fight over that for a few moments before she realized I was being completely serious and wouldn't let her even see the gossip if she didn't promise it.

"When she promised, I gave her the parchment and she read it to me. Once she realized what she had just read, she asked me if I was sure of it, and I told her that I had proof, so she smiled and promised to keep it to herself until after she got a piece of

parchment." Padma sighed loudly. "She's going to be talking about this for days. Hopefully she'll be able to remember her promise and keep her part of all of this out of it. She probably will, but when it comes to Parvati and gossip..." Padma trailed off and everyone understood what she was saying.

"Well, these are done," Harry told the others, handing each person a small handful of parchment, each slip folded in half so that no words were visible.

"How are we supposed to get these to people without anyone noticing?" Ginny asked again once her slips were carefully in her pocket.

Harry shrugged around a mouthful of food, but Hermione answered. "We could leave a couple of piles on seats that are going to be filled by classmates with a note on top saying to pass them around. No one will know who left them as the person – or people – who had the pile on the chair will be able to truthfully say that there was just a note to pass them around."

"Great idea, except for one problem," Susan stated while Maya nodded from beside Harry.

"What's that?" Terry asked.

"We've got to write the note that says to pass them around so that no one will know who's handwriting it is, and I'm pretty sure Padma's sister won't do it twice," Maya answered.

While the others were all fighting it out, Harry and Ginny, who was sitting on his other side, were busy using the parchment from before. No one noticed as the two of them quietly whispered back and forth, finding letters from what Parvati had said so that they could cut them out. By the time anyone had noticed that neither of them had entered the fight, there was a clean sheet of parchment with a note written in cut and pasted letters, all of it done with a wand.

Please pass these around to the entire class.

"How did you two do that?" Matthew asked as he was the first to see the note. Everyone turned to see what he was talking about as Harry made eighteen copies of the note, two for each leader.

"Cut out the letters from the parchment and stuck them to another one with our wands," Ginny replied as she inspected one of the copies and saw that they didn't look like the letters had been stuck onto the parchment, which was exactly what they had hoped for.

"Why didn't I think of that?" Hermione, Terry, Padma, and Bradley all asked at the same time, proving that all of them were Ravenclaws when it came to the mind, even if Hermione was a Gryffindor at heart while the others were Ravenclaws through-and-through.

"Because you all were fighting it out," Harry stated as he finished the last copy, "and didn't bother to stop and think of the obvious."

"Well, it's almost time for class, so we'd better go," Maya stated as she picked up her two copies of the note along with the others.

"We'll lead you to class again," Harry stated as the other second year leaders told their first year counterparts the same. "What do you have this time?"

Maya pulled out her schedule, checked to see what class she had, and burst out laughing. "Oh man! This is going to be perfect!" she exclaimed through her laughter while passing Harry her schedule.

Harry took one look at her schedule and also burst out laughing, followed by Ginny, who had been reading over his shoulder. Barely feeling when Hermione stole the schedule from his hand, Harry looked up just in time to see the others all burst out laughing as they saw that Maya and the first year Slytherins had DADA right after lunch. It would be the perfect place to have one of the groups pass out the notes as questions would be asked from all over the room to Lockhart, something he deserved.

After everyone had finally stopped laughing and Maya had her schedule back, Harry led her to the Slytherin table where they picked up their classmates before heading to the DADA room. When they got there, Harry made sure he was at the back of the group because he didn't want Lockhart to try and talk to him like he had the night before.

"Have fun," Harry told Maya with a wink and an amused smile that showed he was still trying not to laugh.

"We'll try," she replied with a bit of a laugh in her voice.

When his friends asked him what that was about, Harry just shook his head and led the group out to the greenhouses, where he quietly put two piles of the parchment onto seats, one on each side of the room. Draco came in and spotted the pile on his side of the room while Daphne had spotted the one on their side. Both of them passed the slips of parchment down the row and then opened their own.

Everyone looked at the parchment in surprise, with Harry faking it. The reason Harry's friends were surprised was because they hadn't expected the fact to be written on a piece of paper that was basically handed to them; the others hadn't had any idea.

Harry looked up when he felt eyes on him from across the room and met Draco's gray eyes. At Harry's raised eyebrow, Draco mouthed, "Tell older Slytherins?" Harry nodded his agreement, and both boys smiled mischievous smiles as they both realized what sort of reaction would come from this.

All Harry could think about was how much fun the first few days were going to be with this sort of information flying around the school. Lockhart would never know what hit him.

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"Sir?" Brandon called as he looked up from the small piece of parchment he held in his hands.

"Yes, Mr. —?" Professor Lockhart replied, still unable to remember names.

"Harper, sir," Brandon filled in before asking his question. "Is it true that you're a fraud?"

Maya was trying so hard not to laugh from her seat on the other side of the aisle from Brandon. The look on Lockhart's face as he stared in shock at the boy was so hilarious that Maya was visibly shaking with her hand over her mouth. She was lucky that they were at the back of the group and no one was sitting next to her besides

Brandon, who was looking at the professor in expectation, waiting for a response.

Though Lockhart didn't know it, his expression was all the class needed to know that what was written on the slips of parchment was true. Every student hid their note so that their professor wouldn't find it and figure out who had spread the truth around, though Maya knew he wouldn't.

"Of course not," Professor Lockhart was finally able to say, though his voice was audibly shaking in fear, shock, and amazement. "Would the Headmaster have hired me if I was a fraud?" he challenged, hoping to make the student believe him, but the Slytherins were all very observant and already knew the truth; they all just wanted to see how he would react.

"If he had no other choice, he would," Laura Carmichael stated. "My father is a School Governor, and he told me that there were no other offers, so Professor Dumbledore hired you."

Maya knew that Laura wasn't lying about her father. It also meant that their plan was going better than any of them had hoped. If what Laura had just said got around the school, then it would be even more obvious that the note was the truth, which meant Lockhart would have the hardest time teaching any student anything.

"I was?" Lockhart asked, pretending to be surprised and his students knew it. "I had no idea. Dumbledore and the Governors never told me that."

"Yeah they did," Laura countered with a snort. "My father told me that you said that it meant no one else wanted to compete against you for a position you 'obviously owned'. The truth is that most people are afraid of the position because they think it's cursed; you're the only one that's either brave enough or stupid enough to take up the offer."

"I'd personally go with the stupid option," Maya offered from her seat in the back, earning flashes of smiles from her friends and a frown from their professor.

"Now, now, be nice Miss –" Professor Lockhart had to stop as he didn't know Maya's last name.

"Pritchard, Professor," Maya filled in for him. "Professor Idiot," she added under her breath, earning a snicker from Brandon before he whispered her words to the others, earning more snickers that Professor Lockhart couldn't find the source of.

"Enough!" Professor Lockhart yelled. "I am your qualified Defense professor. Where did you all hear these atrocious lies?"

"We don't know, Professor," Maya said for the entire group as they all looked at her. Internally, Maya was trying not to laugh at her professor while another part of her was proud that her group had accepted her as their leader so quickly; Harry had been right that she was a natural leader when she needed to be.

"What she means, professor, is that we're not sure who started it," Kevin interjected before their professor could tell them off or Maya could get herself detention for being cheeky, which she had just been about to do.

"Yeah," Stephen agreed when he saw what Kevin was trying to stop. "I just found a little sheet of parchment somewhere, and it was written on it. I'm pretty sure the others did as well." The entire group nodded in agreement.

"And where did you find these notes?" the annoyed professor questioned. All seven Slytherins could tell that he was going to explode shortly if they didn't head him off.

"On the floor in the hallway, Professor," Maya stated matter-of-factly before the others could tell him the truth. "I dropped mine after I read it."

The others all looked Maya in the eye as they realized what she was trying to do. Maya didn't want their professor to know that the so-called "lies" had been spread in his own classroom.

Once they all realized what she was doing, the others all agreed with her immediately. Maya watched as her classmates slipped a hand into a pocket and quickly pulled it out again, obviously hiding the note to keep for later.

"Well, then, you all can stop the vicious rumors and lies before they get out of hand, can't you?" Professor Lockhart suggested.

The students all agreed, Maya knowing that all of them would do exactly the opposite and spread the truth around the school.

After class, all of Maya's friends surrounded her as they made their way down to the Entrance Hall to go out to the greenhouses and Herbology. It startled Maya when Laura asked her a question.

"It was you, wasn't it?"

"What?" Maya asked, her head flying to look at the other girl.

"It was you and the other leaders who wrote that note, wasn't it?" Laura elaborated, realizing that Maya didn't know exactly what she was asking.

"No – how did you know?" Maya asked as she gave in, seeing the looks from the others that showed they all already knew.

"We've been watching and it's obvious that Harry wants a leader in each year for each House," Isabella informed her.

"He's been talking to you and you're the most likely one of us to be the leader, what with how you just act like one," Stephen said, throwing in his Knut of information.

"Personally, I think it's actually a really good idea," Brandon said thoughtfully, his index finger tapping his chin as he thought. "Gives each group a person to turn to if they need help, and it doesn't make it look like he's trying to use his fame to control the school."

"I can tell you that he hates his fame, but he's using it to do good for everyone, not for selfish reasons," Maya informed her friends as they finally reached the marble staircase and walked down it towards the doors that led outside.

"Oh, I can tell just by watching him," Kevin stated. "Plus, from what I can tell he's the leader of the leaders."

"He's accepted he is, but he told me he's mostly taking the role because he realizes that most of his year already looks at him as

their leader because he's the Boy-Who-Lived." Maya's face showed how she felt of the title, though the others realized that it was also how Harry felt about it.

"I have to say that I like what he's trying to do," Laura said slowly. "I mean, destroy the feuds between the Houses... a hard thing to do, yet he's actually succeeding. It's hard to believe he's actually doing it so well."

"Well, we have Herbology with the Ravenclaws, so we should try to make friends with some of them," Maya informed the group. "Try pairing with a Ravenclaw for the class and see how it works out. If Bradley, their leader, is any example, they'll find out about you a bit and then it won't be hard."

With that, the group got to the greenhouses and entered greenhouse one. A few of the Ravenclaws were already there and spaced out, as if waiting for the Slytherins to come and mingle with them.

Maya reassured her friends and then went to go sit next to a blond girl on one of the benches. The girl gave Maya a smile that made her seem like she wasn't quite there, as did the look in her eyes, but when Maya looked into her eyes more closely, she realized that the girl was actually as observant as a Slytherin with just a different way at seeing things. That one look made Maya decide that, even if the girl next to her believed in the craziest things, she'd be friends with her because she was sure to have the most interesting insights and observations with a mind that she seemed to have.

"I'm Maya Pritchard," Maya said as she held out a hand for the girl to shake. "Pureblood, leader of the first year Slytherins, and someone looking for more friends."

"Luna Lovegood," Luna replied with a slight smile. "I'm also a Pureblood and someone looking for more friends as the only one I have is Ginny Weasley in Gryffindor."

"Why don't we be friends then?" Maya questioned with a friendly smile on her face.

"I'd like that, I'd really like that," Luna replied as her cloudy-blue eyes became just a bit less cloudy, as if making friends was breaking

down whatever wall she had built over the years. Maya hoped she could make it disappear so that the girl underneath would shine through, even if the girl was something she didn't expect.

This chapter has probably the largest coincidence I've had in writing this story up to date. I know many of you won't believe me when I say this, but I'm going to say it anyway. When I wrote the scene with Maya checking her schedule, it wasn't my plan for her to have DADA. You see, I've got a schedule for each year in Word, and I was just using the first year schedule I made for Harry. I truly burst out laughing when I saw what was the next class; then I had fun with it. :)

Okay, I know what you're all going to say as my friend said it to me. All I ask is that you wait for the next chapter before annoying me about the Slytherins agreeing too quickly. Go back and re-read it - the chapter never says anything about blood in there. I personally believe that that will be the harder thing for a Pureblood Slytherin to accept, not the Houses, though that would be tough as well.

It's just after 12:30AM, meaning it's Sunday for me, so please bear with me if I missed some mistakes while editing this one last time. Anyway, I have something to say here that I'd really like a comment on either by Message or Review, if possible.

I've got an offer for all of you, but I want you to really think about it before you answer as it's a pretty big deal for me. You see, I realize a lot of you want faster updates than I'm offering. The second story has ended up a lot longer than I was expecting as it's already on the 25th chapter and not even done with fourth year yet. So, I have a proposition for you all.

After I write the part between the Second and Third Tasks, I've got plans through the entire summer, which means it'll take me a month at the most to write it (The summer will be pretty long). Because I know this, starting this week, I'll speed up the updating to two times a week. WAIT, though! The thing is, if I get to the point where I've only got 20 chapters in storage, I'll go back to the once a week posting because those 20 chapters will disappear so fast that I won't be able to keep up with it.

The other option is that I keep up at the pace I'm going of every Sunday, and when I finish the second story all together (5th year as

well as 4th), I'll post three times a week until the entire 4th year is posted before I go back to either once or twice a week depending on how far I am in the third story.

The choice is yours, my dear readers. Pick your choice and leave it in a review.

I hope you enjoyed the chapter. Please leave a review? :)

Posted: 1/30/11

Added: Can the Anonymous Reviewer by the name of "Andy" from the last chapter please leave me a way to contact you if you wish for me to talk with you? Thanks!

Chapter Eighteen

"Did you hear that Professor Lockhart might just be a fraud?" "I couldn't believe it when I heard!" "How could he be a fraud?" "I think it's true! His classroom is full of pictures of himself and the entire lesson was on his stupid books!" "Could it be true?" "Is there actually proof?"

Whispers followed Harry and his four Slytherin friends as they traveled through the halls to dinner from the library, where they had met up with the other leaders to make sure it had all gone well. Harry had to hold in his smirk as he heard all the rumors flying around; it seemed Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown had begun to spread the word the minute the first afternoon class was done.

Harry knew that many of the students would need proof of the claims, but just the fact that people doubted Lockhart meant that everything was headed in the right direction. Any doubt at all meant that he would be questioned at every turn and it would be harder for people to believe their professor. Just that one seed of doubt, now planted in the minds of the school, would lead to distrust.

"Nicely done," Tracey whispered to Harry from beside him as she looked around the halls and listened to the brand new gossip flying around.

"Thanks," he replied with a small smile as he caught her eye.

"And the seeds of doubt are laid," Daphne said from the other side of Tracey with a smug smile on her face. It was obvious to the group that Daphne truly despised Lockhart, probably because he was lying just to look good.

"Next they'll need proof," Harry informed her quietly as they finally reached the Entrance Hall and saw groups of students all whispering quickly back and forth, small slips of paper being passed around and discussed.

"Good point," Blaise commented from behind the three. "How are you going to make that happen, Harry?"

"Haven't decided yet," Harry admitted as they sat down at the Slytherin table, Theo and Daphne on the other side of it.

"Well, first you should have Laura here pass around the fact that her father is a School Governor and they had no choice but to hire Lockhart as he was the only person willing to volunteer for the job," the voice of Maya stated matter-of-factly from behind Harry, who turned to see the first year Slytherins along with a blond Ravenclaw.

"And would Laura be willing to do this for us?" Harry asked as he looked at Isabella, Catherine, and Laura, not sure which one was Laura.

"I would," the girl with the dark-brown hair and hazel eyes stated with a slight smile, showing that she both knew that he didn't know which girl she was and enjoyed the idea of spreading more gossip about the fraud of a professor.

"Excellent," Theo stated as he rubbed his hands together in anticipation before reaching for some chicken to put onto his plate.

"Harry, this is Luna Lovegood," Maya said as the rest of the first years sat down around the second years. "Luna, this is Harry Potter."

"Pleasure," Harry said as he held out his hand to the blond with cloudy eyes. He could see something hidden in her eyes, but he couldn't figure out what it was.

"Nice to make your acquaintance Harry Potter," Luna replied as she took his hand lightly and shook it. "You don't have any Wrackspurt around you, so you should be fine for now." Luna gave Harry a dazed smile.

"A what?" Draco asked as he got to the table and sneered slightly at Luna, playing his part for his group of Slytherins.

"A Wrackspurt," Luna repeated calmly. "They're invisible and float through a person's ears to make his or her brain go all fuzzy and make it hard to think."

"I'm glad I don't have any around me then," Harry said kindly to Luna after giving Draco a look for show; they didn't want Draco's friends to get suspicious.

"Me too," Luna said with a small smile and a nod before turning to Maya. "Thank you for introducing us. I think I had better leave you all to your meals and go eat at my table. I do believe your Housemates don't appreciate my presence here right now."

Luna nodded slightly down the table where, indeed, many other Slytherins were looking at her with disdain. With a final wave, Luna skipped off to the Ravenclaw table, where she sat between the first and second years, starting up a conversation with Padma, the most likely second year to be kind to her even with her ideas.

Draco and his friends were all laughing at Luna while Daphne, Theo, and Blaise looked at her with confused eyes. The first years were glaring at Draco and his group for laughing at her even as Harry and Tracey shared a look that conveyed their thoughts on Luna.

"Oh stop laughing you idiots!" Maya snapped at the laughing second years. "Just because she believes in things most don't doesn't mean she's an idiot! She's in Ravenclaw, which must mean she's intelligent, so why don't you try to use your brains more?"

"Calm down Maya," Harry said softly as he placed a hand on her arm while using the other to gesture at Blaise to budge over and make room for Maya. "Draco just doesn't understand."

"And you and your friends do?" she asked with anger still in her voice while she sat, though Harry knew most of it was aimed at Draco, not him.

"I'm not sure about those three," Harry admitted as he gestured to Daphne, Blaise, and Theo, "but Tracey and I can tell that she's an intelligent eleven-year-old who just has a different way of looking at the world. Really, she just believes in things most don't; that doesn't make her weird or anything like that.

"Besides," he added after a moment, "it means she'll see things others don't because she looks at things differently. You'll just have to try to understand what she's truly trying to say from what she's said."

"What do you mean?" Laura asked from across the table.

"Harry means that she'll say something that doesn't seem to make much sense but it will have a hidden meaning to it a lot of the time," Tracey answered for Harry as he took a bite of chicken.

"Like what?" Isabella asked.

"She just told me that my mind is clear," Harry informed them.

"And that means – what, exactly?" Theo asked, earning himself a look from Harry before Catherine answered his question.

"That Harry isn't confused, is in his right mind, and nothing is controlling him except himself," she stated.

"You all are crazy, you know that, right?" Draco asked from down the table, looking directly at Harry, who just rolled his eyes.

"Most definitely the kettle calling the cauldron black," Maya whispered into his ear, making him smirk and earning Harry a dark look from Draco and his friends.

"Anyway, we should all be nice to Luna," Catherine stated. "She's a nice girl, but after her mother died... she started looking at things differently."

"Do you know her from before school, Catherine?" Stephen asked curiously.

"Our mothers were very good friends," she replied a bit sadly. "After the accident with her mother, my mother invited her over quite a lot to give her someone to be around while she grieved. After that, she came over once a month. She just wasn't the same after her mother's death."

"I'm glad she had you as a friend, then, Catherine," Maya said after a few minutes of silence where everyone ate and digested what Catherine had told them. "And now she's got us as well, right you all?"

"Oh yeah!" Brandon said while the other first years all nodded. "Anyone who needs a friend can turn to us."

"You're working your magic again, Harry," Tracey muttered to him while the first years began talking about the few friends they had from the other Houses.

"Only a bit," he replied. "Listen to the names of the families they're mentioning; they're all Pureblood."

"So you're saying we need to retrain them?" she asked.

"I'm saying I just need to do exactly what I did with you four," he stated with a smirk on his face.

"Oh shut up." Tracey hit him on the arm, making his smirk grow.

"We plant the seeds into their minds and let them prove it to themselves," Harry said as he stopped smirking.

"How do we do that?"

"Talk to them in the Common Room, of course," he replied as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

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Harry and Tracey were sitting on a couch in the Common Room playing a game of chess when Maya brought the other first years over.

"Sorry to interrupt, but these guys all have some questions," she said softly as she sat down on a chair she had dragged over.

"It's fine," Harry replied, turning to face them while he pulled his cloak around him tighter, trying to ward off the cold of the Common Room. "So, what do you want to know?"

"What's your goal?" Brandon asked without hesitation, obviously the chosen person to ask that question.

"To make everyone realize that Houses and blood don't really matter," Harry stated just as quickly, having expected that question.

"Blood?" Laura asked, looking between Harry, Tracey, and Maya.

"Purebloods, Half-bloods, and Muggle-borns, is there really a difference?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Of course!" Isabella replied as if it should be obvious.

"How so?" Tracey asked, her own eyebrow raised.

"Muggle-borns don't know anything about the Wizarding World, Half-bloods have almost no power, and Purebloods have it all and wealth!" Isabella replied with pride in her voice as she spoke of Purebloods.

"I'm a Half-blood, and I've got some good power," Harry informed her, which made her freeze as she realized he was right.

"That was all political stuff you were talking about, Isa," Maya stated as she gave one of her oldest friends a look.

"You – you agree with this?" Isabella asked in disbelief, looking at her best friend.

"Remember Natalie?" Isabella nodded. "Her parents are both Muggle-born, but only Graham and I know it."

"What – what... you've got to be kidding me!" Isabella exclaimed. "They act exactly like Purebloods!"

"Yet both of them are Muggle-born," Maya stated with a nod and a small smile.

"Blood doesn't make a difference, not really," Harry said as Isabella said nothing and only gaped at her friend in disbelief. "Purebloods have money and more political power and know more about the Wizarding World, Half-bloods have some political power depending on name as well as some money and knowledge about both worlds, and Muggle-borns know all about the Muggle World and don't have much political power.

"Other than that, they're all the same, really. We all have magic – that doesn't just go to Purebloods – and anyone can climb up a political ladder if it's done right. Really, I think the Half-bloods have it the best; know about both worlds."

"So you're not just trying to combine the Houses, are you?" Kevin asked with his head cocked to the right, a confused look in his eyes that showed he was trying to figure it all out.

"No, he's trying to convert the whole school into realizing the prejudice between Houses and blood is stupid," Tracey said with a small smile for Harry as she looked at him. "Each year he wants to convert the first years. We all know some will be harder than others, but he actually made Theodore Nott agree with him, and we all know how hard that must have been."

"So... can you explain what you're doing in more detail, then?" Brandon asked with slightly wide eyes as he realized that Tracey wasn't kidding about Theo.

"The one leader for each House in each year mostly came from the fact that I've got a couple of close friends from each House and all of the others in the House look up to them because they've got some sort of leadership quality in them," Harry admitted softly. "It made me think that if I did that with each year, then it would be easier on every House because they'd have one person to turn to who could talk to the other leaders or me."

"Oh, we all agreed that we like that idea," Catherine stated. "It's brilliant, if you ask me, to have someone each House can turn to in every year. Plus, it would make it easier to plan study groups because you only have to inform the leaders and the rest will find out easy enough." The rest of the first years nod in agreement.

"That's nice to know," Harry said appreciatively with a small smile. "Otherwise, I'm just trying to make the Houses of each year realize that what they've heard about the other Houses isn't true, and that we can all get along if we put in a little effort to get to know one another."

"The thing is, to do that, you all have to realize that blood isn't all that important, but I'm not going to force it into your minds; I'm going to let you see it for yourselves." Harry smiled at the eleven-year-olds in front of him as they tried to figure out what he meant by that.

"How are you going to do that?" Kevin finally asked after they all shared confused looks, even Maya, for a few moments and realized none of them had an idea of what he meant.

"Study with the other Houses," he responded matter-of-factly. "Don't ask about blood; don't show off that you're a Pureblood or a Half-blood. Just study, talk, find things in common, and have fun with kids in your year. If someone doesn't know something about the Wizarding World, don't make a big deal about it, just tell them about it.

"Basically, make friends," he finished as he saw realization cross the faces in front of him and a small grace Tracey's lips.

Harry could tell, then and there, that these Slytherins would be converted within the month. Just the idea of only making friends and not caring about blood had them all smiling slightly at the idea. Actually doing it would make it even better, though it would probably be a bit hard in the beginning.

"Good night you guys," Harry said as he and Tracey got up to go to bed, knowing that these seven would be up talking about it for a while.

With a wave from each of them, the two almost-twins went off to bed with a shared smile.

...

"How's it going with your first years?" Harry asked Terry, Padma, Susan, and Hermione as they met outside the Great Hall the next morning before breakfast.

"Ginny helped me convince the Gryffindors to give it a try," Hermione said quickly as she obviously wanted to be first. "It does help that there are a few Muggle-borns in Gryffindor who helped convince the few Purebloods and numerous Half-bloods." She paused there, a look on her face that said she was fighting internally.

"Let me guess," Harry stated slowly as he fought to roll his eyes. "The problem is the Slytherins."

"Yes," Hermione agreed with a nod. "Those who know of the feud between the two Houses seem to think that you're all slimy snakes that can't be trusted."

"So they're basically thinking like Ron?" Padma asked after a moment.

"I was expecting it," Harry admitted while Hermione nodded. "Maya already knows that she'll have to go slowly with the Gryffindors as they'll be the hardest, but she also knows that she and the other Slytherins need to make the first move with them. They're planning on working on it during Potions Friday."

"At least they have a plan," Terry muttered under his breath.

"The Ravenclaws were convinced by the fact that you all were so kind to Luna last night," Padma informed Harry. "They saw the older students as well," she added when she saw his face, "but Luna came back to the table going on about how kind most of the second years were along with the first, and they all glanced over at your group and realized what she meant."

"What do you mean?" Harry questioned even as he made a mental note to thank Luna for that later on.

"Your group at the Slytherin table is different, Harry," Susan said slowly. "The rest of the table talks pretty quietly, and some even have a dark aura around them. But you and your friends... you all are laughing, having fun, and smiling throughout meals; even when you're being serious your section of the table has this lightness around it.

"It actually helped convince the Hufflepuffs as well," she admitted after a moment of letting Harry digest the idea that he and his friends were the light in Slytherin.

"Well, then, I guess we're doing pretty well," Harry stated with a smile a minute or so later. "Now, the Lockhart situation." The other four smirked as they thought of what the day before had wrought in the school.

"Laura Carmichael's father is a School Governor, and he told her that Lockhart was only hired because he was the only one stupid enough to volunteer for the job, not because he was the best man for it," Harry informed them. "She's been passing the fact around the Slytherin Common Room all night and this morning, so the Slytherins all know.

"Maya and the others are going to tell the other first years as they have classes with them and ask them to pass on the fact through the Common Rooms. Let the first years do this as it will be more believable; it'll be coming almost directly from the source."

"How else are we going to prove this all to them, though?" Hermione asked curiously.

"We don't have to," Harry replied with a smirk as Susan also smirked, realizing what Harry was doing. "The students will have the doubt seeded into their minds by the end of the week, and then Lockhart can prove it by being incompetent in the classroom over the next week. In fact, I've got his class as the last class of the day, and I believe Gryffindor has it right before us, so it's going to be easy to pass rumors around the school about the lessons."

"So basically you're letting them all feed off their own doubts to figure it out for themselves?" Hermione clarified.

"If we try to give them even more proof, they'll think it's been faked," Terry decided as his face showed realization, telling Harry he was finally figuring out the plan. "By letting them all see it for themselves, they can tell it isn't faked."

Harry just nodded with a small smile before nodding and heading into the Great Hall to catch up with his friends and eat before Charms.

As he sat down after waving to some of his friends in the other Houses, Hedwig landed in front of him and held out her leg so that he could retrieve the response. She then grabbed a bit of toast and flew off back to the owlry for a rest.

Tracey leaned over from his right to read the letter from her father with Harry.

Harry and Tracey,

That idea is simply brilliant, and I know the charms to make it all work, but it will be at least a couple of weeks before you get the number of black Journals you've requested. Also, to put the charms on the colored Journals, you'll have to send them home to me for a

couple of days so that I can charm them all. Those ones will be slightly harder because I'll have to work around the active charms already on it.

Now, none of that means it can't be done, just that it will take a couple of days for me to charm your Journals, and I can only do a few at a time. I'm figuring it'll be a month and then you'll have all the Journals you need. After that, I'll work on making a storage of just the black Journals.

Let me know if this is alright with you. You should get the first package in around a week.

Love,

Dad

"That's actually what I was expecting," Harry admitted as he finished the letter, rolled it up after checking to be sure Tracey was done, and slipped it into his bag before anyone else could read it.

"Me as well," Tracey agreed as she straightened up and took a bite of food before continuing. "Either way, it's progress, and we'll be ready to bring more into the group by the time they're all agreeing to everything. It'll probably take that entire month just to convince some of them, anyway."

"Good point," Harry replied with a slight nod around a forkful of eggs. "I think a month should be the normal trial period to see how many in each House can be converted. After that time, we'll give those converted the Journals and wait until the rest are converted to give out more of them." Harry looked over at Ron Weasley and his friends as he said this, thinking about how they'd be welcomed if they ever got over their bias.

"You're so forgiving and give so many chances, Harry," Tracey informed him softly, though he knew she didn't think it was a bad thing as she had a soft smile on her face that he returned.

"I can't help but hope he'll come around and bring the others with him," he admitted with a pained look on his face before he took another bite.

"As long as you're cautious up to a point, that's not really a bad thing, Harry."

"I know. I won't be able to feel that for someone truly evil, someone truly gone, but he's just arrogant, prideful, angry, and biased. It's not really his fault that it's in his nature to act like this."

"And that, Harry, is why you're the leader of the group," Tracey stated in such a tone that the conversation ended and the two of them ate their breakfast in peace.

...

Draco: Hey, Harry?

Harry: Yes Draco?

Draco: Can you, Theo, and Blaise meet me in our Dorm after dinner? Crabbe and Goyle will stay in the Common Room.

Harry: I'll pass it on, but can I ask why?

Draco: I got a package from father during breakfast, and I want you three to see what's in it. There was a pause for a moment. Do you know when tryouts are? Is there a practice or something Saturday?

Harry: I don't think there are tryouts unless you talk to Flint, but I know for a fact that Wood has booked the Pitch Saturday. We might as well be kind and let them use it. Besides, do you want there to be practice Saturday?

Draco: No way! I was asking to be sure I didn't have to talk to Flint tomorrow. I'll talk to him Sunday so that he won't have a reason to schedule practice until next weekend.

Harry: Phew. I really don't want to start practice already. I need another week to get back into the swing of school before that starts again.

Draco: I know what you mean. Well, I've gotta get off the Journal. Pansy is giving me odd looks.

Harry: See you later.

...

"So, what is this about?" Blaise asked Draco after dinner in the second year boy's dorm.

"Father's promised package got here this morning, and I thought you three would want to see what's inside when I open it," Draco replied with a smug smile as he pulled a wrapped parcel out of his pocket and untied the ribbon holding it closed.

"What would we want to see that's this small?" Theo drawled as he watched from behind Draco.

Harry said nothing as he had a slim idea what was in the parcel, so he just watched as Draco placed seven tiny, rectangular boxes on his bed beside Harry. Draco didn't answer but un-shrunk the boxes and they grew to almost the length of the bed, one on top of the other.

"Are these what I think they are?" Harry asked Draco as he picked up one of the boxes and held it on his palms.

"Open and see," was the smug reply from the blond.

Harry opened the box and his smile grew as he saw the black broom with Nimbus 2001 written on the handle. He lifted it out of the box and held it gently while trying to hide his smirk as he heard the intakes of breath from Theo and Blaise as they finally realized what the parcel had contained.

"No way!" Blaise exclaimed as he opened another box and reverently picked up another of the brooms, soon followed by Theo and Draco.

"Seven..." Harry contemplated. "One for each team member..."

He looked up sharply at Draco, who was smiling smugly as he eyed the broom in his hands, though he looked up when he felt Harry's gaze.

"Draco, you do realize people are going to think you bought your way onto the team, right?" he questioned the blond, who looked a bit shocked as he realized Harry had a good point.

"Bloody hell, what am I going to do?" he asked Harry while Theo and Blaise looked between the two in a mixture of shock and surprise.

"Don't tell Flint about the six other Nimbuses until you use only one of them to make it onto the team," Harry suggested. "Theo and Blaise can use their brooms to tryout and get places on the team. Once the tryouts are over, you can tell Flint that you have a donation for the team to making winning again this year even easier than having some really good players. That's when you give the rest of us the brooms."

"Brilliant, Harry!" Blaise exclaimed.

"It is," Theo agreed. "The rest of Slytherin will know because Flint and anyone else at the tryouts for the three of us will tell everyone else, and then they'll know that Draco didn't buy his way onto the team but made it fair and square before giving us all a gift."

"Thanks Harry," Draco muttered quietly with a look of pure gratitude on his face.

"No problem," he replied with a smile. "Besides, with these brooms and the four of us on the team, the other teams won't know what hit them!"

The three other boys cheered along with Harry before they all hid six of the seven Nimbus 2001s in Draco's trunk, shrunken; Draco's was left normal-sized.

By the time they went back into the Common Room, all four boys were in good spirits.

I hope you're all enjoying Lockhart's downfall, because it was fun to write it. Unfortunately, the makeup work I've got from school because I basically missed the entire week is NOT fun. You're all lucky to be getting this right now because I should be doing my Pre-Calculus work, but instead I'm updating just for all of you. :)

Anyway, I have to thank all of you for your opinions on what I should do. Many of the comments were insightful and all were very kind. My decision is to post twice a week until Becoming Alpha is totally done. If, by some miracle, the sequel is finished by then, I may or may not continue. My guess, though, is that I'll go back to once a week for the sequel until I'm done with it and at about this same point in the third story.

I'm glad you all enjoyed Maya's POV. At points throughout the entire series, I find it easier to write from a different view point. Most of the story will be from Harry's view, but in year four there are a lot of different places that I'm using a different view, Maya's included in it. It gives the story a different insight and sometimes shows something Harry has no idea about, so this won't be the only time I use it.

I'm off to go downstairs (Meaning away from the laptop) to finish that dumb math homework as well as my chemistry... Please review to make my afternoon better once my homework is done. :D Plus, I've been sick ALL week... Be kind to a tired teenager?

Posted: 2/6/11

Chapter Nineteen

The next month of school went by pretty uneventfully.

The first year Slytherins proved to their Gryffindor counterparts that they were normal eleven-year-olds and not demons disguised as humans; the four Houses had been doing homework together ever since.

Draco, Theo, and Blaise had made the Quidditch team as Chasers and Keeper respectively after demolishing the boys who had held those positions before them. The Nimbus 2001s had been received greatly by both the House and the team, though the other teams were anything but pleased as they realized that, not only did Slytherin have an excellent team, but they were on the best broom out there.

A week after Harry and Tracey received Mr. Davis' response and replied to it, Hedwig brought them a package of shrunken black Journals, each lined with the House colors. The next week came a package the same size as the Nimbuses has been that was full of shrunken, plain black Journals.

Once all of those Journals had been received, Harry and Tracey began asking for the colored Journals from the others, telling them that they were being sent to get updated, which was completely true; the two of them just weren't explaining the updates just yet. They began with the Slytherin Journals, then the Hufflepuffs followed by the Ravensclaws, ending with Neville and Hermione.

After all of the Journals had been updated and sent back, with a couple of extras that were colored instead of plain black, three-and-a-half weeks had gone by, so the two almost-siblings had hung onto every single Journal until a month into the school year.

Harry and Tracey began with their Slytherin friends in second year, asking each of them to confirm that they didn't want feuds between the Houses or blood before giving the Journals back. When asked why they had to check, the two had informed the Slytherins that there was a charm on the Journals now that didn't allow anyone wanting to feud at all, not even those with the possibility of feuding in the future, to use them, so they had to check. If they changed their

minds, they couldn't use the Journal anymore, nor tell anyone about them.

Next came the first year Slytherins, who had the charm explained before they touched the Journals marked for them; each still accepted the Journal. All of the first years except Maya got a normal black Journal, but Maya got one of the black Journals that had silver and emerald green thread around the edge of the outside of it. Harry's own emerald green Journal had silver lining around the edge.

As the pair went around the other Houses, all of the first and second years except for Draco's group – minus Draco of course – and Ron's group accepted the terms and the Journals. All of the leaders got lined Journals as it marked the leaders in each group. Anyone who had had a colored Journal before had gotten it back with the updates – and some with lining.

Ginny and Luna were agreed upon by the entire group to get colored Journals as the two had become very close friends. They got fiery red and magenta respectively.

A couple of Slytherins were upset that they hadn't gotten colored Journals as well, but they had all seen that both girls, especially Ginny, had truly joined the group of Harry's closest friends. Luna had just begun hanging out with them whenever she could, and they all began to figure out how to understand her; Ginny was also a constant presence who added in her two Sickles when she could.

When Harry and Tracey had gotten all of the first and second years they could, they went to Cedric, Lee Jordan, and the Gryffindor Quidditch team, giving the seven of them black Journals.

As the two had passed out Journals, they explained how to use them to all.

When the leftmost page was tapped once, a new screen opened up for every single person with a Journal. It had a list with each House named on it, one for the people using the Journals and another for the people not using the Journals at that time. If one touched one of the Houses, it said all of the years that had a Journal in it, even if it only had one person in the year; the other years just weren't listed unless they had a Journal in them. Tapping the year led to the names of each person with a Journal in it.

Under the list were two squares like the "Show" one on the rightmost page that said "Make" and "Join". If someone touched "Make," then he or she could then tap on the names of up to six others and a note would be sent to the chosen people telling them who was inviting them and who else was in the group.

Join, on the other hand, showed a list of who was "hosting" each conversation, and tapping on the name showed who was in the group with said host. Then there was a button to request to join, which was sent to the host to accept or decline.

The only exceptions to the seven people in a conversation rule were the leaders and Harry. Each leader could ask his or her entire year to join a conversation for something like a study group or another conversation that needed most of or the entire year for. Harry could go a step further and call the every single person into a conversation if he had to, though he claimed at every opportunity that arose in the beginning that it was something that would be for the leader of the leaders, not just him.

Those with colored Journals pressed and held their index finger to the leftmost page, and it went to the screen that they were all used to, which only they could use, none of the black Journals.

If a leader tapped the same page twice, it went to a list that was for only the leaders. It was basically a place for the leaders to all go into so that study sessions and other things like that could be planned by year, House, or all of the students.

All of the Journals had been a huge hit with those who had them, and none of the professors could even tell that they were Journals, let alone that students were using them to talk among themselves. To the professors, the Journals were notes, homework, a normal journal or diary, a letter home, or something else in that form. The only thing that the students were careful about was not using the Journals during a test of some sort as all of them had learned early on that the leaders could, and would, glance at conversations and stop any cheating.

As September slid into October, the weather got more moist, though it didn't stop any Quidditch training except on the worst days of rain for the Slytherins. In fact, October was quickly rushing to an end with

all of the study groups within the Journal group, as they began calling themselves, Quidditch practice for the players, classes, and just learning to work together.

The only little detail that stood out to Harry that confused him ever so slightly was Ginny Weasley. For some odd reason, Harry caught her either writing in her red Journal or in an old, battered, black diary. It confused him, especially as some days it looked like she had gotten very little, if any, sleep. Harry asked Hermione and Neville to keep an eye on her while he kept watch from afar.

Blaise, Theo, and Draco teased him about how he was paying attention to Ginny, but Tracey and Daphne shut them up when they saw that Harry was truly worried about her for some reason. Tracey, especially, knew that Harry seemed to have a sixth sense for some things, and that was what this seemed like, so she too kept an eye on Ginny, quickly catching on to what had Harry so worried.

In the two months or so of school, Lockhart had become the laughingstock of both the staff, though they kept it to themselves, and the students. It was obvious to all that he was a fraud and had absolutely no idea what he was doing. Harry and his close friends were all amused when stories reached their ears of the different classes of DADA.

Overall, it had been an interesting almost two first months of school, and the Quidditch season as well as Halloween were almost upon them.

...

"No, Hermione," Harry said forcefully with even a bit of anger in his tone.

"Please, Harry?" she begged.

"For the last time, no, Hermione!" Harry growled. "He's made it absolutely clear over the past year or so that he wants absolutely nothing to do with me."

"Please, Harry, I'll go with you," she continued to plead.

"Hermione, Hagrid hasn't talked to me since before the Sorting when he told me hello as I walked over to him. The last real conversation I've had with him was when he took me to get my supplies from Diagon Alley." Harry sighed deeply. "Once I was a Slytherin, he started avoiding me, even when we both knew I had seen him and wanted to say hi. He just can't stand the idea that I'm a Slytherin." Harry's head was hanging sadly as he said this.

"If I'm with you and claim to be your friend, he'll let us in and let you talk to him, I know it, Harry!" Hermione argued, convinced she was right.

"No, Hermione, just no," Harry stated as he turned away from his Gryffindor friend and looked out over the lake, tired after a Sunday Quidditch practice.

His other friends were all showering and doing the Charms homework he had already finished, so he had decided to go sit by the lake, only to be joined by Hermione a few minutes later, where she had then begun to try and get Harry to agree to try visiting Hagrid even though the half-giant obviously didn't want anything to do with Harry. Ever since his Sorting, Hagrid had avoided all contact with Harry, so Harry had never even bothered to try and visit him at his house, though it seemed that Hermione had done so more than once and wanted him to try it.

"Please, Harry," she begged once more, knowing just as well as he did that she was wearing him down.

"If I go, will you stop begging me?" he finally asked in defeat, knowing the persistent Gryffindor had won this round.

"Yes!" she had exclaimed as both an answer and in happiness that she had finally succeeded in wearing him down.

"Fine," he groaned as he pushed himself off the ground to his feet before offering a hand to help Hermione up, which she took gladly. "But you're the one explaining why you're dragging a Slytherin to his home, got it?"

"Sure, sure," she replied vaguely with a wave of her hand like it was nothing.

Hermione led Harry to the one-room cabin by the edge of the Forbidden Forest and knocked on the door. The sound of a dog barking greeted the two of them until Hagrid opened the door himself.

"ell 'ello there Hermione!" he exclaimed when he saw her there; then, he saw Harry. "Wha' yeh doin' bringin' him 'round here?" he almost yelled.

"Hagrid, Harry's my friend!" Hermione stated angrily, obviously upset. Harry decided not to point out that he had warned her that this would happen if they visited Hagrid.

"Wha' yeh doin' bein' friends with 'im?" Hagrid asked more calmly, though he was still giving Harry a look he didn't like.

"Because he isn't like most Slytherins and is kinder than most people in the school put together," she replied, anger still apparent in her voice, though she was trying to force it away.

"S tha' right? Well, then, c'mon in you two." Hagrid stepped aside and gestured into the room with a hand, still watching an uncomfortable Harry.

"Tea?" Hagrid asked as he bustled around the kitchen, grabbing three mugs and a plate of rock cakes.

Harry accepted the tea but didn't touch the cakes. Anyone who paid even the slightest attention to the twins knew that Hagrid's cooking was dangerous. Even the twins wouldn't dare eat it.

"So, is wha' Hermione says true?" Hagrid questioned as he looked at Harry, slowly sinking into a chair with his own mug of tea.

"I guess," was Harry's reply as he shrugged. "Most of my friends claim it's true, though I still don't see it, but that might just be because no one sees themselves properly."

"Hagrid, Harry has friends in all four Houses, not just Slytherin," Hermione interjected, obviously trying to get Harry back on his good side. "In fact, he's got the first years, some of whom he's friends with, not fighting between the Houses or blood. The only time any fights

go on between Houses is about the Quidditch season. Harry here is combining the Houses!"

"S tha' so?" Hagrid said in surprise as he looked Harry over again, a more friendly look on his face. "'M sorry 'Arry. I should'a given yeh a chance to prove yerself to meh instead o' just assumin'. Can yeh forgive me?"

"Of course, Hagrid!" Harry exclaimed with a smile, just happy to know that Hagrid, the first person to be kind to him in his entire memory, wasn't mad at him anymore, especially not for something he didn't do. Though he had to admit he'd be a bit cautious around the man for a while.

"So, anything new going on, Hagrid?" Hermione asked with a smug smile on her face, obviously proud of herself for ending the feud between the two.

"Well, there's been a bit o' a problem with dead roosters, but I talked to Professor Dumbledore – great wizard 'e is – an' we put up a charm to protect the res' o' 'em from wha'ever it might o' been," Hagrid informed the pair. "Otherwise, I'm jus' growin' the pumpkins for Halloween. C'mon and take a look."

Hagrid led the two of them out into his backyard and they both stopped short when they saw a pumpkin patch with pumpkins bigger than the two of them put together. Hagrid was smiling proudly at them, and that smile grew when he saw Harry and Hermione's faces.

After that, the pair spent a bit more time with Hagrid before heading back to the castle for dinner.

...

"Yeah, let's use this on them, and that on those people, and definitely that on them!"

"And I can use this lovely one on them! I've got the perfect idea."

"I do believe we have a plan and a deal, boys."

"I believe we do."

...

"Do you see Ginny?" Harry asked from his spot at the Slytherin table at the Halloween Feast as he had finally gotten done looking around at decorations.

"I don't," Tracey said as she shook her head slowly, also a bit worried as it wasn't like Ginny to miss something like the Halloween Feast.

"I'm really worried about her," he informed his friend as he shifted a bit in his seat, ignoring the feel of his Invisibility Cloak rubbing against his stomach, where he was hiding it under his robes.

"We know," Theo groaned from across the table. "Can you stop worrying about your crush for one night, please?"

"Theo, she's not his crush!" Daphne exclaimed as she looked up and down the Gryffindor table, having caught Harry's remark to Tracey and also checking. She was beginning to see what the two of them saw about Ginny and why they were so worried.

"Sure seems like it," Blaise commented from Harry's other side. "He's always worried about her, watching her, and asking about her."

"With good reason," Maya said from the other side of Tracey. "She's slowly been getting quieter and quieter all school year. Yesterday, in Potions, we were working together and she didn't say a word that didn't have to do with our potion, which is a first for her. I'm getting worried about her, too."

Harry just raised an eyebrow at Blaise and Theo, knowing he had won this round. The two of them sighed and the subject was dropped, though Harry, Tracey, and Maya kept an eye out for Ginny with Daphne helping a bit too.

Dinner was halfway done when changes began to happen. All of the Gryffindors began to grow scales on their skin. The Ravenclaws got black fur while Hufflepuff got feathers. The Slytherins all began to get a reddish-gold fur on their skin. Up at the Head Table, the teachers all began flashing between black and orange.

At first there was a bit of a panic before people began to realize that it was a prank and they weren't hurt at all. Once they all began realizing that, laughter was ringing out in the Hall. Everyone was comparing themselves to the friends at their tables; some had more or less of the change depending on how much they had used the infected objects.

"Well, it looks as if another prank has been played on us," Professor Dumbledore called as he stood up, his eyes twinkling and a bit of a smile dancing over his lips. "Very creative and well done, but if you're caught having pulled the prank, you will have to receive detention."

With that, the Headmaster sat down and began conversation with Professor McGonagall, who didn't look at pleased with the prank except to the few, Harry included, that could see her lips were tighter in an attempt to not smile. Plus, Harry and the twins knew the prank was a mixture of Transfiguration and Potions.

After working for countless hours searching for the right charms and potions, they had finally found a potion that worked like a timer, setting off the charm that was on the benches at each table an hour into dinner.

"Was it you and the twins again?" Theo asked with a smirk that was barely visible through the fur on his face.

"Whatever makes you say that?" Harry questioned, pretending to sound insulted by the very idea of it even though he knew his eyes gave him away to his friends. He was barely holding in his laughter at how well the prank had gone.

Harry felt his pocket heat up and pulled out his Journal to see a bunch of people on the Group part, which was the black Journal screen, all asking him to make a conversation with them all. Sighing, he gave in and the screen was suddenly full of people telling him and the twins that it was a really good prank.

Catching the twins' eyes, he could see the pride reflected in them that he himself felt.

Looking around the Great Hall, Harry saw a bunch of people getting up to feel the different types of skins from the prank. It seemed that

all of the students found their prank hilarious and none of them were complaining about it.

Harry decided it was probably a good thing he had talked the twins out of changing hands into something else, or even trying to find out how to turn everyone into the full animals instead of just the skin. If they had done that, the others wouldn't be quite so forgiving or finding it as funny, nor would they be enjoying it for a while.

Harry spent the rest of dinner chatting with the other Slytherins, though he left his Journal open so that the others could use the group to chat with their friends from other Houses. It wasn't until Professor Dumbledore stood up, obviously to dismiss them all, that Harry dragged the twins into another conversation and asked them if they had seen Ginny.

Fred: No... We haven't seen her since before dinner, actually.

George: After we leave the Hall, we'll just need a couple of minutes to find her, then we can go get her if she isn't in her dorm.

Harry: Tracey's giving me one of those looks that says she's coming along with as well, and I have an odd feeling a few others here will come too, so expect a group if she isn't in the Common Room.

Fred: Got it!

When they left the Great Hall, Harry slipped his Cloak on and followed the twins to a shadowed corner to watch how they found their sister.

Fred pulled out a piece of spare, old parchment and George tapped it with his wand, stating, "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good." Then, much to Harry's amazement, ink lines suddenly appeared on the parchment, forming into a map of Hogwarts with more parts to it than he had found, followed by little ink dots labeled by name that showed where each person in the castle was.

Slipping away quickly and pulling his Cloak off, Harry had to hide a smirk as he realized that this was the trade secret the twins hadn't wanted to tell him yet. It meant that he knew their secret while they still didn't know about his.

Unfortunately, the idea of something being wrong with Ginny made it so that he couldn't enjoy the victory for long before the twins hurried over to him.

"She's in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom on the second floor," George informed Harry while Fred tried to slip the map into his pocket without Harry noticing; he only pretended not to.

"Let's go see if something is wrong, then," Harry replied as he gestured to the group watching them: Tracey, Daphne, Hermione, Maya, and obviously reluctant, Blaise and Theo.

The group rushed up the stairs ahead of a lot of the Gryffindors and Ravenclaws, as well as some Hufflepuffs walking friends to dorms, not wanting to stop talking.

Harry, who was behind most of the group, was concentrating on something he was just barely hearing over the noise of the students, but he was hearing it, as if it was a whisper.

"...rip... tear... kill... soo hungry... for so long... kill... time to kill... I smell blood..." The voice suddenly got louder and Harry could hear it for sure over the other students as

they got closer to their destination. "I SMELL BLOOD!"

By the time they got to the second floor corridor where Moaning Myrtle's restroom lay, they had many people following them, even Draco and his friends, and Harry was very worried by the voice he had heard, which seemed to be something trying to kill.

Harry was looking ahead of him, trying to take in all the details he could to make sure nothing was wrong as the voice truly had him worried, which made it so that he was the one to spot the words written in what looked like blood on the wall outside the bathroom, which seemed to have been flooded.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.

"STOP!" he yelled at his friends, drawing their attention away from the bathroom, which they had just been about to enter, and back to him.

"What's wrong?" Hermione asked, but Harry couldn't answer; he just gazed at the words on the wall until every person in the hall gasped as they read them and realized what they meant.

Then, looking closer at the wall, Harry saw that, hanging from the torch bracket under the words, was Mrs. Norris, Mr. Filch's cat, who helped the caretaker catch students breaking the rules.

"Oh no," he gasped as he saw that the cat wasn't moving at all, which surely meant she had to be dead, though he hoped it wasn't true as it would break Mr. Filch's heart to lose her, no matter how evil she may be.

"What's –" Hermione again stopped as she caught sight of what Harry was staring at.

"What's going on here? What's going on?" Mr. Filch's voice demanded as he forced his way through the crowd around Harry and his friends, every single student staring at the blood red words on the wall and the cat under them. It seemed the crowd had attracted his attention.

"My cat! My cat! What's happened to Mrs. Norris?" he demanded as he fell back, clutching his heart, after spotting his beloved pet.

"You!" he yelled at Harry, startling every person in the hall as they all knew Harry wouldn't hurt Mrs. Norris even in a life-or-death situation, and they had all seen him every moment from the beginning of the Feast until they found the cat.

"You did this! You've murdered my cat!" Filch was so close to Harry now that he was spitting on the boy's face in his anger. "I'll kill you for this! I'll kill you!"

"Argus!" the voice of Albus Dumbledore called down the hall, opening a path down the middle of the crowd of students with just his presence, followed closely by the Heads of House and Gilderoy Lockhart.

"All of you, come with me," Professor Dumbledore told Harry and his friends – Ginny now included in the group, Harry noted in surprise –

as he gently took Mrs. Norris off the torch bracket. "Argus, come with me."

All of them all followed the Headmaster to Professor Lockhart's office when he offered, which, Harry was disgusted to see, was full of pictures of himself all grooming themselves with hair curlers and other things. The painting-Lockharts all ducked out of their frames as none of them looked presentable.

Harry and his friends ignored Mr. Filch's ranting about Harry's expulsion while they watched Professor Dumbledore mutter words under his breath and tap Mrs. Norris with his wand. It took him a few minutes before he straightened up, no twinkle in his eye and a dark expression on his face.

"She is not dead," he stated quietly, "but she is Petrified, though how I don't know."

Filch tried to blame it all on Harry, but Dumbledore denied it saying that it took dark magic to Petrify like that, not something a second year could do. While this was going on, Harry could feel Professor Snape's gaze on him, and he looked straight into the gray eyes of his Head of House, not afraid of him in the slightest.

"What I would like to know, is why you all were in such a rush to get to that part of the school," Professor McGonagall stated as she gave her Gryffindors a stern look, not even noticing Professor Snape's nod in Harry's direction as Harry's meaning finally got through to him; he knew that Harry had absolutely nothing to do with it and was as confused as everyone else.

"We were looking for Ginny," Harry stated as all of his friends turned to him for the answer. He knew that he had to act his part of the leader at a time like this.

"Miss Weasley?" Professor McGonagall questioned in surprise.

"Yeah," he replied with a nod. "She wasn't at dinner and we were worried about her. I asked the twins if they had seen her, and they came back a couple of minutes later telling me that she was in the second floor bathroom, though I still don't know how they knew that." Harry gave the twins a look as he said that before continuing, "Once we knew that, we all rushed up to see if there was something wrong.

"When we got to the second floor, I saw the writing on the wall and stopped the others just before they went into the bathroom to check on Ginny. You all know what happened after that." Harry gave one sharp nod while looking at Professor McGonagall.

"And what were you doing in the bathroom right by the scene of the crime, Miss Weasley?" Professor Dumbledore asked, drawing the attention to Ginny.

Harry looked at her closely and didn't like what he saw. She had light circles under her eyes, stating that she hadn't gotten much sleep the last couple of nights. Her robes looked like they had been hastily cleaned, and her hair was a mess. Ginny was also swaying slightly, as if she was going to fall over sometime in the near future; the twins had obviously noticed it as well as they were on either side of their sister, ready to catch her if needed. What hit him the most, though, was that her normally pure brown eyes had a tinge of red in them, making them look like mud more than the normal chocolate.

"I wasn't feeling so well, Professor," she said softly, dropping her gaze to look at the ground. "When I had been headed up to the Common Room to lie down, I felt like I was going to be sick, so I hurried into the nearest bathroom, which happened to be that one. I threw up a few times and couldn't move.

"It was only the sounds coming from the hallway that got me up and moving enough to leave the bathroom to see what was going on. When I got out, I went straight to the twins and leaned on them to stay upright while I watched what was happening. Then you asked all of us to come here, so the twins helped me get here." The twins were nodding in agreement to the information involving them, confirming what she said.

"Minerva," Professor Dumbledore said after a moment, "please take Miss Weasley to the Hospital Wing while Mr. Filch accompanies you with Mrs. Norris." He turned to the caretaker. "She will be perfectly fine at the end of the year when the Mandrakes Professor Sprout is growing are fully mature.

"As for the rest of you," he continued as he turned to look at the rest of the group, "I believe five Points apiece for checking to make sure a student wasn't in trouble. You were doing the right thing; you just

ended up at the wrong place at the wrong time. Please, go back to your Common Rooms."

Professor McGonagall, Ginny, Mr. Filch, and the Petrified Mrs. Norris all headed to the Hospital Wing while Harry and his friends got into groups by House and went back to their dorms, the look on their eyes stating that Journals were to be used once they all got back, Harry making a group.

...

Harry, Theo, Blaise, and Draco, who had ordered Crabbe and Goyle to stay in the Common Room for an hour and a half longer, were all in their dorm using Harry's Journal to talk to all of those with colored Journals, minus Ginny, plus Maya, though each boy was using their own to read the conversation.

Harry: NOW do you believe me?

Theo, Blaise, and Draco: Yes...

Tracey: *Mutters* Took them long enough.

Harry: They're all blushing in embarrassment. *Snickers*

Theo, Blaise, and Draco: SHUT UP!

Hermione: Enough! We have more important things to talk about than who was right and wrong. Does anyone know anything about this Chamber of Secrets?

Daphne: The Chamber of Secrets is Salazar Slytherin's Secret Chamber.

All Non-Slytherins: WHAT?

Harry: *Snickers* I like that one. "All Non-Slytherins."

Susan: Not the point right now, Harry!

Harry: Alright... Sorry... Just thought it was funny... No need to snap.

Maya: It's a story we tell in Slytherin once a year, usually the first of October, to remind us Slytherins about what Salazar's goals for us are, or so the older students claimed.

Tracey: The story goes that Godric, Helga, Rowena, and Salazar were fighting over whether or not Muggle-borns should be taught at Hogwarts or not; Salazar was the only one against it. In the end, Salazar and Godric had a fight, and Salazar left Hogwarts for good.

Theo: Legend says that, when Salazar left the school, he sealed up a chamber within the school.

Blaise: The thing is, the school has been searched many times, and no one's ever seen hide nor hair of the Chamber of Secrets.

Harry: There's supposed to be a monster in the Chamber that will finish Salazar Slytherin's great work and rid the school of those not pure of blood, meaning Muggle-borns.

Draco: Most believe that there isn't a Chamber of Secrets, but father told me a story as I grew up... Fifty years ago, the Chamber of Secrets was opened and a Muggle-born died, the one to open the Chamber expelled, probably still in Azkaban today.

Terry, Padma, and Hermione: Really?

Draco: Oh, yes. Father knew I'd be a Slytherin, so he wanted me to know every detail I could about my House, the Chamber being opened among the most important things he ever told me, though not many know about the Chamber being opened back then.

Fred: This is great and all, but...

George: If you haven't noticed, we've got a problem now, not in the past!

Neville: They actually made sense for once!

Luna: Of course they do. They can't always have Nargles around them, can they?

Fred: Anyway... We've got a problem.

George: Our baby sister has been acting odd lately, and now she's found feet from the scene of the crime?

Fred: There's something very wrong with her, and we don't know what it could be.

George: And it's worrying us greatly.

Maya: I'll talk to the other two leaders and a couple of the first year Gryffindors; we'll keep an eye on our friend!

Harry: Thanks Maya, that'll make it easier on those of us that don't see Ginny very often during the day. Now, Silver, Emerald, I believe you have a piece of spare parchment that can help us. May I possibly borrow it for a few months?

Everyone But the Twins and Harry: HUH?

Fred: We have no idea what you're talking about, Harry, my boy.

Harry: I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.

George: Harry, my boy, you're too good for the both of us.

Fred: Because of this, we'll give you our spare piece of parchment to keep in the morning.

George: Just promise us that you'll use it well.

Harry: Of course I will, but I'm also betting you both are hoping to borrow it from me here and there, right?

Fred: George, my friend, I believe he knows us better than anyone else.

George: I do believe you are right, Fred.

Harry: I'll come by your part of the Gryffindor Table to pick it up at breakfast. Thanks!

Both Twins: Our pleasure, Harry.

Hermione: What are you three talking about?

Harry: Trade secret, Hermione, sorry.

Susan: What trade?

Hermione: *Rolls eyes* He means Pranksters Only. They were the ones to pull the prank tonight, remember?

Susan: Oh... right...

Maya: I think that we should all just be careful and watch our backs until we have proof about who might be the Heir.

Hannah: Is there any way to know who might be the Heir of Slytherin?

Justin: Yeah, is there something only he would be able to do?

Hermione: Slytherin is known for being a Parselmouth, so I'm betting we're looking for a Parselmouth, right you Slytherins?

Maya and Draco: Right.

Harry, Theo, and Blaise had all stiffened when they read that, and Harry could tell that the two boys were trying not to look at him. He knew that if word got out that he was a Parselmouth, every single person, most professors included, would think that he was the Heir of Slytherin. Slytherin student, lots of pull among the youngest in the school, and a Parselmouth – all perfect excuses for him to be the one pulling the attacks.

Hannah: Harry, Theo, Blaise, Tracey, Daphne, is there something wrong?

Blaise: No, nothing's wrong.

Theo: I agree with Blaise.

Harry still couldn't reply, so he let the two boys answer for him. He was still digesting the idea that he might be accused to attacking other students just because of a skill he didn't even know how he had it.

Justin: Well, now that I know to be careful around any Parselmouths, I'm going to head off to bed. Thanks for all of the information you guys.

Hannah and Susan: Yeah, we're off to sleep also.

Hermione: Good night all. I've got a lot of thinking to do tonight, so I'd best get started now.

Fred and George: Lee needs us!

Luna, Padma, and Terry: Good night.

Neville: I'd best get to bed before Ron and the others get there... I need to seal my curtains closed so that they can't get past them.

Maya: Laura needs me now that she can see the conversation dying down. She stinks at Potions and I'm the best in our year, so she needs homework help. Good night you six.

Draco: Why were the five of you silent when Parseltongue was brought up?

Tracey: It's nothing Draco. We just hadn't realized that was probably the truth, so it shocked us slightly.

Draco: Got it. Well, I'd better go get Crabbe and Goyle before they hurt someone else, or more likely, themselves.

Draco left the room after turning off his Journal, leaving only Theo and Blaise in the room with Harry while Tracey and Daphne were in their dorm as well as the only other two to make up the group still on the Journal.

Daphne: Harry, you CANNOT use Parseltongue AT ALL this year, not even by accident! The effects of even a single person hearing you will be disastrous!

Harry: *Sigh* I know Daphne. Why do you think I fell silent? I'll be accused by basically everyone in the school professors included. Only you four and Ginny know my idea, and that might not even be true. If anyone finds out, I'll be the school exile at the least, arrested at the worst. It'll ruin everything I've done to try and unite the Houses.

Trust me, Daph, I know every single consequence that could come from a single slip from me. I'm not in Slytherin for nothing.

Daphne: Sorry.

Harry: *Sighs deeply* It's fine...

Tracey: Harry, it'll be okay, you'll see. By this time next year, you'll be able to speak Parseltongue without anyone thinking you're a Dark Wizard, just watch.

Harry: I'll try, Trace, I'll try.

Blaise: Well, I for one am exhausted, so good night all.

Theo: 'Night.

Daphne: See you all in the morning.

Tracey: Just us, then.

Harry: Just like this summer. Thanks, Trace, for just being here.

Tracey: You're like my twin, Harry; I'll always be here. You are most definitely the brother I never had, and I'm going to do everything I can to keep you with me.

Harry: *Laughs Quietly* I needed that. And you're my sister, too, Trace. Heck, your parents are sort of like the parents I don't have – the ones I've never had.

Tracey: 'Night Harry.

Harry: Good night, sis.

I hope you all enjoyed the longest chapter so far, because I know many of you have been looking forward to this one. *Grins*

You all have your Chamber plot, now, and trust me, it only gets better from here. ;-P This, and possibly the previous chapter, though I don't think so, is among the first or second chapters I wrote while on a writing drug of some sort that I didn't even know I had taken that allowed eight chapters to be written in two days.

By the way, yes, I do know the ending was too fast, but sometimes it happens. *Shrugs sadly*

The next chapter follows the book a bit, but it's different. Quidditch. *Grins* I hope you enjoyed this chapter.

I'll be posting after school on Wednesdays, since I forgot to mention it on Sunday.

Please, leave a review and let me know what you thought of my introduction to the Chamber of Secrets. :)

Posted: 2/9/11

Chapter Twenty

The next week was full of talk about the attack on Mrs. Norris, the Chamber, and the first Quidditch match of the season Saturday – Slytherin versus Gryffindor. The mood of the school was a mixture of excitement, anxiousness, and nervousness. Most students always had at least one friend with them at all times, just to be safe.

Harry was always surrounded by his friends, especially the four Slytherins that knew he was a Parselmouth. He gathered that they were worried he might be thought of as the Heir of Slytherin, so his friends didn't want to chance other students jinxing him, especially in the week leading up to the match.

When the morning of the match dawned, Harry was pleased by the weather outside; sunny with very little wind. It would make for a good match between the largest Quidditch rivals. The twins had told Harry quietly the day before that Wood was going crazy about the upcoming match, which Harry found hilarious as Wood had a pretty good team formed; he didn't really have to worry as much as he was.

Harry, Theo, Blaise, and Draco were waiting while Flint lectured the two Beaters on what they had to do; the four of them already knew their roles. Harry wasn't as nervous as his friends as this wasn't his first time playing on the team in a match, but he knew how it felt and tried his best to keep them all calm.

Mounting his broom outside, Harry had to hold in a smile just before kicking off, knowing that he would be entering his domain when he entered the air. Up on a broomstick in the air, he was at home.

Moments after the game started, Harry, who was high up in the air and looking for the Snitch, had to duck an incoming Bludger that his team's Beaters had missed. Growling in frustration, Harry turned to tell off the Beater nearest him when the sound of moving air warned him just in time to duck the same Bludger shooting at him again from behind.

From that moment on, Harry was dodging both the Bludger and the Beaters, who took turns defending him while the other controlled the other Bludger. It was with relief that Harry flew down to the ground when Flint called a time-out, obviously to figure out what was going on.

"What is going on up there?" Flint yelled once the whole team was on the ground in a circle. "I've only got one Beater controlling the Bludger at a time!"

"Flint, that other Bludger won't leave me alone at all!" Harry exclaimed in defense of himself and the Beaters while pointing for the rogue Bludger. "These two are taking turns protecting me so that you get Bludgers shot at Gryffindors and I don't get knocked off my broom!"

"You two, come with me," Flint ordered as he moved away from the second years.

"Harry, what's going on up there?" Tracey asked breathlessly as she and Daphne got to the four boys.

"That ruddy Bludger won't leave me alone!" he yelled, annoyed with it all. "I'm not going to be able to catch the Snitch unless it flies up my sleeve at this rate. Between the Bludger and one of the two Beaters, I can't see a thing."

"How is it chasing you like that anyway?" Theo asked.

"Is there anyone or anything that might be trying to get your hurt or killed for any reason whatsoever?" Daphne asked.

"No..." Harry froze as he remembered one detail that they hadn't really discussed when it had happened because of the events after it. "Actually... yes."

"What?" Daphne, Theo, Blaise, and Draco all exclaimed while Tracey caught his eye and he saw realization flash in her eyes.

"Dobby," he stated, surprising all of them, but none more than Draco.

"What does this have to do with my house-elf?" he asked.

"Your house-elf?" Harry almost yelled as he spun around to face Draco.

"Dobby is the Malfoy house-elf," Draco replied with a nod, surprised and a little scared by the reactions from the Slytherins.

"Your house-elf tried to get me expelled!" Harry yelled.

"We'll explain later," Tracey said quickly to cut off Draco's obvious questions. "Just... call Dobby and see if he is the one controlling the Bludger. If he is, tell him to stop and leave Harry alone."

"Dobby!" Draco called after nodding in Tracey's direction, his eyes promising that he wouldn't forget her promise to an explanation.

"Master Malfoy called for Dobby?" Dobby said as he appear with a CRACK!

"Yes, Dobby," Draco replied. "Are you the one controlling the rogue Bludger chasing after Harry here?" Draco gestured in Harry's direction with a hand, making Dobby realize where he was and who was around him.

"Yes, sir, Master Malfoy, sir," Dobby squeaked in a scared voice that showed his fear of punishment.

"I order you to stop messing with the Bludger and let Harry play normally!" Draco ordered. "Nothing else is to be done if Harry is left alone, so don't punish yourself this time," he added as an afterthought when he caught Tracey's raised eyebrow.

"Oh, Master Malfoy is so kind," Dobby said before snapping his fingers. "Bludger will not follow the great Harry Potter anymore," he informed the group, though it was obvious he was following orders against his better judgment and with regret.

"Leave unless I call again, Dobby," Draco snapped, a bit angry that Dobby would do something like that.

"Yes Master Malfoy." Dobby disappeared with a CRACK! again.

"It's all taken care of, Flint," Harry called over to where Flint was telling off the Beaters once there had been silence for a few minutes.

"I'm not going to bother asking how you did it," Flint grunted as he walked over again. "Just get back into the air and catch that Snitch while the score is one hundred to twenty, Potter!"

"Got it!" Harry replied with a slight smile before swinging his leg over his Nimbus 2001 and soaring back into the air, this time without a rogue Bludger chasing him.

Without the rogue Bludger bothering him anymore, Harry became a huge asset to the Slytherin team, all while searching for the Snitch.

Whenever his Chasers – mostly Draco and Theo, he noted smugly – were going towards the Gryffindor hoops and their Chasers were trying to block them from getting there, Harry would shoot like an arrow at them from all directions. Once he even dove straight down, barely pulling up in time to stop from hitting the ground, flew to under them, and shot straight up from below.

Once the Chasers started getting out of his way, it allowed his team to slip through and face Oliver Wood, who couldn't save every Quaffle thrown at him.

The Beaters were having an all out war with the Bludgers; the twins shooting and the Slytherin Beaters retaliating non-stop. Neither team got hurt badly from the Bludgers, but at least two out of the three Chasers on each side were going to have a nice size bruise the next day along an arm or side.

Patricia Stimpson was flying around trying to spot the Snitch, but was having about as much luck as Harry, who was looking for the Snitch more than helping out his team.

After four hours of play, Slytherin had a huge lead of two-hundred-and-fifty to Gryffindor's seventy. Flint was gesturing for Harry to catch the Snitch now, but Harry just couldn't seem to find it.

He was about to use his hands to tell Flint that when he saw the Snitch fly right under Draco, who was flying in midair, waiting for Theo to get close enough to throw him the Quaffle.

Racing towards Draco, Harry just narrowly missed him as he chased after the Snitch, obviously scaring Draco from his yell of shock. Harry couldn't concentrate on that, though, because he was almost to the Snitch and could see Patricia joining the chase out of the corner of his eye.

Just as she got into Harry's slipstream, Harry reached out with his hand and snatched the Snitch right out of the air, barely turning in time to stop from hitting the commentator's podium.

Smiling hugely and holding the Snitch above his head, Harry flew towards Draco, Theo, and Blaise, who had defended Slytherin's goal posts with a vengeance.

Just before Harry reached his friends, something heavy and hard bashed him in the back of his head, and Harry felt himself falling towards the ground before he blacked out from the pain.

...

Pain coursed through Harry's head when he woke up, and he fought to hold in a groan, just barely succeeding.

Slowly, he tried to open an eye, but the light burned it and he snapped it closed immediately. This time, he couldn't hold in his groan of pain.

"Harry!" Tracey exclaimed quietly from beside him, reaching out to grab his right hand.

"What... happened...?" he asked slowly and painfully, his eyes still closed.

"A Bludger hit you from behind, mate," Theo said from further down his right side, obviously next to Tracey.

"The thing is, no one hit it at you," Blaise informed him. "Our Beaters wouldn't dare, and the twins wouldn't either, fearing retaliation from you."

"Dobby?" he asked quietly.

"Possibly," the voice of Draco said from by Harry's feet. "I ordered him to stop messing with the Bludger and to let you play normally. He did stop right then, and he did let you play normally. Unfortunately, once the game was over, he felt my orders were done and he could send the Bludger after you one last time."

"What was the final score?" Harry asked once he had digested the idea, the pain receding just enough that he could talk normally.

"Four-hundred-and-ten to seventy," Daphne stated from his left. "Draco scored once more before you caught the Snitch."

"That's awesome," Harry said with a slight smile, though his eyes still remained closed in fear of more pain from the light. "Where is everyone?" he asked after a moment.

"Harry, you've been out cold for a day; it's Sunday night," Tracey said quietly.

"What? How?" he exclaimed, though weakly as his head was still pounding.

"You've got a concussion, Mr. Potter," the voice of Madam Pomfrey said sternly as she walked over. "Luckily your friends realized the danger of being hit in the back of the head so violently and lowered you to the ground carefully, then stood guard around you until I could get there so that no one would move you even slightly."

"You were very lucky. The Bludger only gave you a fractured skull along with the concussion, and I fixed your skull up easily enough; it'll hurt for a few days, but it's healed. If that Bludger had even touched your spine, you could have been paralyzed, but it just missed," she finished in a tone that basically said that he was very lucky to be fine like he was.

"What does that mean for me, then?" he asked with his head pounding and eyes closed, still trying to take in what she was saying.

"You'll be here until Friday at the very least, Mr. Potter," she informed him sharply, as if daring him to argue. "I need to keep an eye on that concussion of yours, and you're not leaving until the pain from your head is gone."

"Yes, Madam Pomfrey," he sighed in defeat, realizing that it was better to listen to her and get healthy instead of leaving early and hurting himself more.

"Good," replied before he heard her move, probably turning to face his friends. "You know the visiting hours, so be gone by then."

The five of them must have nodded because Harry heard the nurse walk off back to her office. He sighed and sunk his head into his pillow, tightening his hold on Tracey's hand to let her know he was okay.

"So... anything happen while I was out?" he asked to nobody in particular. The sudden tension in the room and Tracey's hand gripping his in a death grip worried him greatly. "What happened?" he demanded.

"There was another attack," Theo said quietly after a few moments, which were probably spent deciding who was to tell him.

"What?" Harry exclaimed, his eyes flying open so fast that the light didn't even occur to him until they were open. This time the light didn't burn and he just blinked to get used to it.

"Colin Creevey was found in a hallway last night with his camera in front of his face and some grapes by his body," Draco stated matter-of-factly, probably trying to hide the emotions Harry couldn't see on the blurry face. Tracey must have noticed his squinting because she put his glasses on his face for him, and he could then see the worried looks on his friends' faces.

"He's Petrified, just like Mrs. Norris," Daphne added.

"They thought he might have been coming to visit you, which is reasonable seeing as every single person with a Journal wanted to visit you," Blaise added.

"Great," Harry groaned as he closed his eyes momentarily. "You're telling me that the so-called monster is attacking students now?" Harry looked straight at Draco, knowing he had information from his father about the last time the Chamber had been opened.

"My father said that students kept getting Petrified until a Muggle-born died last time," Draco informed the group. "Let's just hope that no one gets killed this time," he added.

"You're sure singing a different song from last year," Theo said with a bit of a laugh.

"You all are," Harry informed his friends with a smile. "I have a feeling you all would have liked this happening on different levels before you came to Hogwarts." Harry laughed at the shocked looks on his friends' faces.

"You know... he's right," Tracey admitted quietly. "Before we came here, all of us would have been proud to see Muggle-borns being attacked and possibly killed."

"But now we think differently and it's a terrible thing," Daphne finished as she smiled at Harry along with the others.

"You've changed us, Harry," Theo said softly.

"No," Harry replied forcefully. "All I've done is shown you another way to look at things, and you all decided that you preferred it to what you grew up with. I didn't change you, just showed you the path you're now on. You did the rest yourselves."

...

After five full days of chatting on his Journal, reading his textbooks to learn lessons, doing his homework brought to him by a different group of friends each evening, and talking with friends after classes and during breaks, Madam Pomfrey finally told him he was free to leave just in time for Friday's dinner.

Draco, Blaise, Theo, Daphne, Tracey, and Maya all met him in the Hospital Wing and walked with him down to dinner, Theo, Blaise, and Draco all joking around and making the rest laugh.

When they walked into the Great Hall and everyone saw Harry among the group, the Slytherins all cheered on their Seeker for his catch and recovery while all of his friends throughout the different Houses cheered because he was better and back among them.

The two Quidditch teams from the match walked up to Harry along with the leaders from the other Houses, all of them greeting him.

"That was an excellent catch, Harry," Patricia told him with a smile that told him he didn't mind that he had beaten her.

"Excellent moves to separate us and open the way for you Chasers," Katie Bell added as she gestured at Angelina and Alicia, her fellow Chasers, who were nodding.

"It was an excellent match," Wood added. "Just unfortunate that the Bludger hit you like that."

"We won't let that happen again," Fred said aggressively, gesturing at George along with the Slytherin Beaters, who were actually agreeing with the twins.

"You played well, Potter," Flint grunted to add in his own two-Knuts. "It was a good match."

With that, the three Slytherin team members went back to their meals while the Gryffindor Quidditch team went back to theirs, though the twins stayed.

"You okay?" Ginny asked quietly as she moved to be beside Harry.

"I'm okay," he replied with a smile as he looked down at the redhead. "Thanks for worrying."

"You don't know how scary it was to see that!" Hermione informed him with a look on her face that Harry didn't want to see again: Pure fear.

"The Bludger hit you on the back of the head and you just fell!" Terry said in agreement.

"I don't want to see anything like that again," Matthew Summers, the Hufflepuff leader, stated.

"Should we find a place to sit?" Tracey asked when she saw that Harry had no idea what to say.

"All of us?" Padma asked with a raised eyebrow.

"I think we should," Harry stated quietly, ending the idea that they wouldn't find a place to all sit together.

"Come on," the twins said, leading the group to the Gryffindor table, much to the surprise of the Slytherins, who had never sat there before because of the animosity from the House.

"Are you sure about this?" Draco asked worriedly, looking over at his friends at the Slytherin table, who, Harry saw, were looking at the blond in disbelief.

"Go to them, Draco," he said quietly. "You're an ally, not a friend, to them, so prove it by showing that you don't have to sit with us."

Draco nodded in agreement and thanks, hurrying over to his friends and informing them of what had been happening. Relief seemed to pass over the faces of the four, making Harry sigh in relief internally.

"Hey, budge over, Lee," George told Lee Jordan, who was smiling as he saw who was with the twins.

"Yeah you guys, we've got some friends that are hungry," Fred added, making the Gryffindor Quidditch team move over with their plates until there was enough room for the entire group right in the middle of the Gryffindor table.

"Great to have you all here, finally," Angelina said with a friendly smile.

"Yeah, we were wondering if you all would ever use the Gryffindor table to sit together," Patricia added with her own smile.

"Well, we're here now," Harry informed them with a slight smirk. "Now we just have to wait for the complaints."

The entire group laughed at the last statement as clean plates and goblets were passed to the newcomers and food and drink were grabbed. The atmosphere in the group was one of having fun and enjoying finally sitting at the Gryffindor table, but a few of the people among the group could feel the coldness around some of the Gryffindors, though most were just smiling as they shook their heads at the silliness.

"Can we join you?" a first year Gryffindor asked the group with her fellow first years there as well as Neville, and they were all gladly put at the edges of the group by the Quidditch players.

Everything was fine until Ron finally got tired of it and stalked over to the group, which caught the attention of the entire Hall yet again as they all knew what would probably happen now that he was moving.

"What are they doing at our table?" he demanded of his twin brothers.

"Eating," Fred stated with a smile.

"I'm sure you know what that is," George added.

"Seeing as it's all you think about," Fred finished.

"Why here?" he growled out, anger pouring off of him.

"Because we invited them here, of course," George informed their younger brother with a smile.

"Great people, great people," was all that Fred added.

"This is Gryffindor table," Ron snarled as he glared at the Slytherins.
"Snakes aren't allowed here!"

"I don't see anyone else complaining," Katie said with a raised eyebrow as she looked around the Hall and saw that, indeed, no one was commenting on the arrangement.

"Just get them away from our table!" Ron yelled, more furious than Harry had ever seen him. This must have been just a bit too far for the hot-headed, jealous, arrogant Gryffindor.

"Professors, do they have to leave our table?" Fred called up to the Head Table, looking at Professor McGonagall specifically.

"As long as no violence comes of it, no," she replied with a small smile on her lips, showing that she approved of the arrangement.
"And that does not give you a reason to pull out your wand and cause violence, Mr. Weasley!" she added when she saw Ron about to do just that.

"If none of the people around them mind, they may stay," she finished as Ron stomped angrily back to his seat between Dean and Seamus, muttering darkly.

"Another mountain scaled, then," Hermione said quietly once the tension had calmed down and conversation restarted in the Hall, though most was about those at the Gryffindor table now.

"Yup," Harry agreed. "Did you see the look on McGonagall's face? She approves of this for sure."

"She does?" Bradley Martin of Ravenclaw asked.

"Oh yeah," the twins said together in agreement.

"The look on her face said agreement for sure," Oliver added.

"Then we're doing well," Harry sighed in contentment as he took a sip of pumpkin juice.

Harry could see that the rest of the school was slowly seeing that the Houses could work together with a bit of work. Even more, they just proved that the teachers approved of it and didn't mind inter-House mingling at meals.

By the time he and his year finished school, he figured the entire school would be converted, hopefully before then.

It's 2:20AM, and I'm still trying to figure out why I'm awake when I've got a headache... Anyway, not much happened in this chapter, so there's not much to comment on. I hope you enjoyed it, and I'll see you all again on Wednesday. Please review to leave your commentary. :)

Posted: 2/13/11

Chapter Twenty-One

The next month or so went by smoothly. Students were walking in groups, no one wanting to be alone in case the so-called monster went after them. Harry and his friends took turns sitting at all the House tables but Slytherin as they knew that the Slytherins would never accept that, though the idea of trying it next year was surfacing here and there.

When it came time to decide if you were going home for Christmas or not, Tracey and Harry were actually seen to be arguing for the first time. Their friends knew that they fought once and a while, though it was more just a disagreement of opinions, but they had never seen one of the debates; now they were being shown a full-out argument in the courtyard one afternoon.

"No, Tracey!" Harry yelled. "I know that I can go home with you, but it's a time for family, and I'm not a Davis!"

"You're as good as one, Harry!" Tracey retorted. "We told you this summer: We take care of our own, and you're one of us now!"

"I know, Tracey! I know! You don't have to keep reminding me. I get it."

Harry was glaring at his almost-twin, and she was glaring right back. Both of them were ignoring the fact that they were outside with a large group of their friends who had Journals, and all of them were staring at the pair in shock as this was the first time basically every single one of them had seen the pair fight.

"I don't think you do, Harry!" Tracey snapped. "If you did get it, you'd realize why we want you there!"

"I do realize why, Trace," Harry said a bit more quietly, fighting back tears. "You just don't understand what Christmas actually is to me, Trace, you really don't."

"What do you mean?" she asked, also quieting down a bit.

"To you, to all of you," he added as he looked around at the group around him, tears in his eyes, "Christmas is a time of happiness, a time of family and gifts and fun. To me, it was a time of pain, a time

that I didn't understand why my cousin got gifts and food and other things while I was locked up or forced to watch. Christmas..." Harry had to hold in a sob. "Christmas has never been a happy time for me, and it's easier to handle it alone now."

"Harry..." Tracey said quietly as she realized what he meant. The rest of the on-lookers were shocked beyond belief, especially those who had grown up in the Wizarding World thinking that Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, had had a wonderful childhood.

"You didn't know, Trace, you didn't understand," he said with a shake of his head to cut her off. "It's fine. Just don't expect me to enjoy Christmas as much as the rest of you."

"Oh, it's better now, more fun, but now I also think about what it would be like to celebrate it with my parents, to have my birth family here with me."

With that said, Harry turned and ran into the castle, only one person following him as he gave up his fight with tears and let them fall unchecked down his cheeks. By the time he had stopped moving, he was at the top of the Astronomy tower, looking out at the snowy grounds below. The sound of footsteps made him turn, and he was surprised to see Ginny coming to stand next to him.

Ginny had been acting very oddly since school had started. Some days she would be the same Ginny he had met on the train the first day: funny, sarcastic, loud, and a great person to be around. Other days, she would be so quiet it was scary. Even more, on the quiet days, she would look as if she was fighting something. Almost every day, she had light circles under her eyes, saying that while she slept most nights, it was an uneasy sleep almost every night.

"Tracey's sorry," she said softly after he had turned to look out at the white Forbidden Forest and the frozen Black Lake.

"I know," he replied, because he did know that she was sorry.

"Why did you run off, then?" Harry could tell by her voice that she was just curious, not trying to be mean; this was the Ginny that he had met on the train, not the quiet one.

"I had to get away," was all he could say, but it was all he had to say when it came to Ginny.

"It hurt too much to think about the past, didn't it?"

"Yeah," he replied, not all that surprised that she understood how he felt. She and Tracey were just like that a lot of the time.

"Then don't think about it," she suggested like it was the easiest thing in the world. "Think about the future and what it might bring."

"Thanks, Ginny, I'll try," he replied, truly meaning it.

...

"I'm so sorry, Harry!" Tracey exclaimed when he walked into the Common Room an hour later.

"I know, Trace," he said as she wrapped her arms around him in a hug, which was something he had finally gotten used to after a lot of work on her part. He wrapped his arms around her and held her as she put her face onto his shoulder and held onto him tightly.

"It's okay, Trace, I understand," he told her softly. "You didn't realize what it had been like for me. If I had just told you the reason why in the first place, this wouldn't have happened. It's not either of our faults. We can blame the Dursleys for this one."

"I think we should," she replied with a chuckle as she looked up at Harry. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine, Trace." Harry gave her a small smile to tell her that he wasn't lying before letting go of her and walking over to the couches where the others were waiting for the two of them.

"You all should just go home," he told them as he sat down, dragging Tracey down with him. "Draco will be here along with the twins and Ginny. I won't be alone, so you should all go spend time with your families." Harry turned to Daphne. "You especially, Daphe; Astoria will kill you if you don't."

"Are you sure?" she asked, but Harry could tell that she and the others all wanted to go home and see their families.

"Completely," he replied with a smile to reassure them. "I'll be fine."

...

"This Dueling Club had better be worth it," Blaise muttered darkly as the Slytherins all walked into the Great Hall.

"It will be as long as it isn't Lockhart trying to teach us," Harry replied with a frown as he thought about the Defense professor, who no one learned a single thing from; he was the laughingstock of the school.

"I believe you mentioned Lockhart?" Draco asked with a groan when Lockhart walked up onto the stage that had been set up in the middle of the Great Hall.

"Yes!" all of the Slytherins hissed when Professor Snape was introduced as an assistant, as it was obvious Snape wanted to hex Lockhart badly and had for a while.

The entire Hall was laughing when Snape used Expelliarmus, the Disarming Charm, to send Lockhart off the stage and into the wall, his wand flying into the crowd of students. Harry and Draco had great fun sending hexes back and forth when asked to find a partner and practice dueling with him or her.

Then Snape called Ron and Draco up onto the stage to duel, and Harry told Draco in a whisper to not harm the boy, which Draco made a face at but agreed to.

Unfortunately, while Draco didn't harm Ron, he summoned a snake. Harry immediately felt the hands of Tracey and Daphne on his arms when they saw the snake, and he knew that was their way to remind him not to even dare try talking to the snake, even if it might stop it.

Moments later, Snape made it disappear and dismissed the Club, obviously displeased by the whole thing.

Draco walked back to the Common Room with his friends, making it easier for Harry's four friends to talk to him about the snake.

"It's a good thing you didn't say anything, Harry," Daphne told him. "If you had, the entire school would have seen it and started thinking you were the Heir."

"I know that Daphne; I wasn't going to say anything," Harry said sharply, a bit annoyed that they didn't trust him to use his head and think before acting.

"Harry, she's just worried about the consequences if anyone hears you," Tracey said softly, placing a hand on his arm. "We all are, really."

"I know, Trace, all of you," he sighed, "but it isn't like I don't know all of this already. When I saw the snake, I tightened my lips so that I wouldn't say anything, and that was before either of you grabbed me to remind me."

"Good," Blaise said, the others all nodding in agreement.

"That means your common sense is actually working," Theo added with a bit of cheek, earning him a slap upside the head from Harry.

"Shut up."

Harry and his four closest friends all just laughed.

...

Harry was walking down a hallway on the first floor after running into Ernie, who informed Harry that Justin was worried he might be attacked, so he was hiding in the Hufflepuff dorms.

Tracey had told him that she'd catch up with him in a minute; she had to use the bathroom.

"Hey Hagrid!" Harry called as he saw Hagrid down the hall.

"Harry!" the half-giant called as Harry ran over to him. "I was hopin' I migh' run inter yeh while I was in 'ere. I got somethin' fer yeh."

Harry saw that Hagrid was holding out what looked like a photo album. Opening it to the first page, he saw that it was a moving picture of his mother, father, and himself when he was a baby.

Looking through a few more pages, he realized these were pictures of his parents and their friends, him included where he could be.

"Thank you Hagrid," he told the man as a tear fell down his cheek.

"It's my way o' sayin' sorry," Hagrid informed him. "Felt bad, so I owled a few o' their ol' school friends, askin' for pictures. Just finished it now. I was on my way to visit th' Headmaster. Thought I'd brin' it along with, jus' in case."

"Thank you," Harry repeated. "This means more to me than you know."

"Well, I'd bett'r go talk to Dumbledore," Hagrid said with a smile as he looked at Harry's face and realized that Harry meant what he said. "Enjoy tha' there book."

Hagrid walked off in the direction Harry had come from and Harry went down the corridor some more, his mind more on the album in his hands than where he was going. Nothing else made it into his mind until he tripped over something on the floor and turned to see a Petrified Justin next to a Petrified Nearly Headless Nick, the Gryffindor ghost.

"No, no, no, no, no," he muttered under his breath. "Not Justin, not Justin!"

Harry jumped as a door banged open next to him and Peeves came shooting out. At that moment, Harry realized the poltergeist would accuse him of attacking the students even though Justin and Colin were his friends. He had never even thought that badly about Mrs. Norris, and he had had some friendly conversations with Nick before.

"ATTACK! ATTACK! ANOTHER ATTACK! NO MORTAL OR GHOST IS SAFE! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES! ATAAAACK!" Peeves yelled at the top of his lungs, drawing out the teachers and students from the classrooms along the corridor.

Harry was still sitting on the floor, staring at the Petrified Justin, feeling Petrified himself from fear and shock. He still couldn't believe that Justin was actually Petrified, even though he knew that Justin was Muggle-born.

"Harry," Tracey said softly as she rushed over to him and kneeled beside him, having finally caught up to him.

"Trace..." he murmured. "I can't believe... Justin..." Harry couldn't say anything else, so he just clutched the album from Hagrid closer to his body.

"I know, Harry, I know," she whispered as she, too, stared at their Hufflepuff friend.

"Mr. Potter, Miss Davis, please come with me," Professor McGonagall ordered.

Tracey helped Harry stand and they both followed their professor to wherever she was leading them. They went up a couple flights of stairs before she led them to a large, ugly stone gargoyle.

"Lemon drop!" she said, it obviously being a password as the gargoyle moved, revealing a spiraling staircase. The two of them got on it when she gestured for them to, and it began to move, taking them back to Dumbledore's office for the second time since they had gotten to Hogwarts.

When they got to the office, Tracey and Harry began looking around, having been too busy to properly look around last time. There were a bunch of silver instruments on shelves along the walls along with bookshelves of books, a couple of them overflowing with them. Also, there were pictures around the circular office on the walls, all obviously of old headmasters and headmistresses.

On a stand by the door was a red and gold bird that looked half-plucked and was making gagging noises.

"A Phoenix," Tracey breathed, looking at the bird.

To Harry's surprise, the bird suddenly burst into flames, the ashes falling to the bottom of the perch. He jumped back and looked at the shelves instead of the perch, and his eyes fell upon the Sorting Hat.

With a quick glance at Tracey, Harry grabbed the Hat and put it on his head; the Hat fell over his eyes again like it had the last time he had put it on.

"Is there a problem, Mr. Potter?" the voice of the Sorting Hat asked into his mind. "Ah, I see, you think it's possible that you're the Chosen Heir I spoke of at the beginning of the year, and you're wondering if I'll confirm the idea for you. Well, I cannot. The Chosen Heir will find out if he is the one when the time is right, not because I say who it is."

Harry took the Hat off his head and put it back on the shelf before turning to see Tracey looking at him curiously. He just shook his head, not willing to explain why he had to put the Hat on again.

Suddenly, the door opened and Professor Dumbledore walked in. Harry was about to say something about his bird, but Tracey beat him to it.

"Your Phoenix finally had his Burning Day, Professor," she told him, much to Harry's surprise.

"Ah, excellent," the headmaster replied. When he saw the shocked look on Harry's face, he spoke right to him. "Fawkes is a phoenix, Harry, and phoenixes burst into flame when they die, and they are reborn in the ashes." He gestured down to the ashes, and Harry saw a baby bird poking out of the ashes now.

"It's a shame you had to see him on a Burning Day," Dumbledore said as the three of them took seats around his desk. "He's really very handsome most of the time, wonderful red and gold plumage. Fascinating creatures, phoenixes. They can carry immensely heavy loads, their tears have healing powers, and they make highly faithful pets."

Professor Dumbledore looked as if he was about to ask Harry and Tracey something when Hagrid burst into the office, a dead rooster Harry hadn't noticed earlier in light of the photo album hanging in his hand.

"It wasn't Harry, Professor Dumbledore!" Hagrid said urgently.

"I know it wasn't, Hagrid," Professor Dumbledore said calmly yet in a voice that carried over Hagrid's, stopping the half-giant cold.

"Oh, right, I'll wait outside then, Headmaster," he said. "Jus' had to be sure yeh knew."

"I do indeed, Hagrid," Dumbledore said as Hagrid left the room.

"You don't think it was me?" Harry asked as he and Tracey shared a relieved look, that having been their biggest worry.

"I do not," Dumbledore said while he looked at both of the students in front of him, both of them wincing in unison because Daphne was making their Journals heat up.

"I just wish to ask if there is anything either of you wishes to tell me."

Harry thought about all of the information he had slowly been accumulating, though he hadn't told anyone about most of it, and felt that he had nothing he wished to tell his professor.

"No, Professor," Harry and Tracey said at once after sharing a look, again showing how the two of them were almost twins.

"Just remember that my door is always open," he informed them both. "And that help will always be offered to those who ask for it."

With those cryptic words, Harry and Tracey left his office, pulling out their Journals and telling their friends about the attack, their minds thinking as fast as they could.

...

"Go," Harry told his friends. "I'll be fine. You need to get out of the castle and see your families while I need all of you out of here. These looks are getting old."

Over the rest of term, the entire school had begun looking at Harry as the Heir of Slytherin, spurred on by the facts that he was a Slytherin, had been at the scene of the crime twice, and that Ron was spreading complete lies about him around the school. Everyone had seemed to forget that he had been out cold for the second attack and had no reason to attack anyone in the school.

His friends had taken to forming a barrier around him, shielding him from the rest of the school to save him from most of the looks shot at him, any hexes people might try, and just to make it easier for him to get to class.

Now it was the morning the Hogwarts Express was leaving for the holidays, and Harry was basically forcing his friends to go. Draco had told Crabbe and Goyle to go home so that he could work on his alliance with Harry, so it was only the pair of them and the Weasleys left at school.

"Just go you guys," Draco added. "I'll keep an eye on him, as will the twins."

"Of course we will," Fred said.

"Besides, Harry has our spare piece of parchment and whatever his trade secret is," George added.

Harry still hadn't told the twins about his Invisibility Cloak, and only the three of them knew what the "spare piece of parchment" was. It was driving his friends up the wall that he wouldn't show them the Map, not that they knew it was a map.

When not surrounded by friends, meaning mainly in class and in the dorms or bathroom, Harry had taken to activating the map and finding his friends along with searching for anything out of place. The only oddity he had found was Ginny. She was going into Moaning Myrtle's bathroom a lot, sometimes even disappearing from the Map altogether.

He still hadn't asked her about it because he didn't want to give away the Map or make her suspicious, so he didn't know why it was, but he kept silent.

"He still won't tell us what the parchment is!" Daphne complained, making the twins share an amused look with Harry.

"Sorry, Daphe, it's my piece of spare parchment," Harry said with a smug smile. "Maybe I'll let you know about it at another time. Right now, you've got to get going."

"Fine," she sighed and their friends all left, each of them turning to look at a waving and smiling Harry one last time before getting into the horseless carriage.

...

Harry dragged Draco down to Hagrid's the next day after they had gotten most of their homework for the break done, knowing that it would mean more fun after it was completed.

"Come on, you haven't even met him," Harry told Draco as they walked out onto the grounds. "He's really nice once you get to know him." Draco said nothing, so Harry also went silent until Hagrid had invited them into his hut.

"Hagrid, this is Draco Malfoy; Draco, this is Hagrid," Harry said to introduce the two.

"Friend o' yers, Harry?" Hagrid asked, to which Harry nodded. "Well, any friend o' Harry's can be a friend o' mine."

"I guess for me too, then," Draco said after a moment when he realized that Hagrid really was nice, though he was still going to be cautious.

"So, anything else odd going on around here, Hagrid, except for the roosters?" Harry asked after taking a sip of the tea Hagrid had provided.

"Well, the spiders are runnin' into the forest," Hagrid replied after thinking about it. "Won' tell me why, but they're runnin' from somethin' in the castle, that much I've gotten outta 'em."

"Interesting..." Harry said slowly, filing that information away with the rest of the little tidbits he had been gathering all year. "Hey, Hagrid, you've been at Hogwarts a long while, haven't you?"

"Bin at leas' fifty years now, I believe," Hagrid agreed. Harry and Draco both started and shared a look as they realized it meant he had been at Hogwarts the last time the Chamber had been opened.

"Hagrid," Draco began slowly, "has something like this ever happened before? While you were at Hogwarts?"

"Ar, it has," Hagrid said sadly. "Durin' me third year. The Chamber was claimed to 'ave been opened, and students were attacked left an' right. Finally ended after poor Myrtle was killed in her bathroom there. Hasn't truly left it since."

"Moaning Myrtle?" Harry and Draco asked in disbelief.

"Ar, she was the poor victim tha' made Tom Riddle say I was the one openin' the Chamber! Ha! Like I could o' done it. No, he foun' me with Aragog."

"Aragog?" Harry asked, trying to keep Hagrid going so that he and Draco could have the full story before Hagrid realized what he was doing. Harry had quickly learned that once Hagrid got into a story, he told it to the end unless he suddenly realized what he was saying.

"Ar, me Acromantula," Hagrid informed them. "Giant spider, can talk, 'e can. 'E was jus' a young spider when it all happened. Riddle tried to kill 'im, so I got 'im out to the Forest, hid him in there, I did. 'E's not evil, not like Riddle said.

"Anyways, I got in trouble as Riddle made it seem like Aragog was the one to attack the kids and kill Myrtle, but he didn'! He didn'! I got expelled, an' Dumbledore made me assistant gamekeeper, gave me a secon' chance. Didn't think I did it, Dumbledore didn'. Great man, Professor Dumbledore, great man."

Harry was surprised by the entire story, but he filed it away to think about later. Thoughts were flying through his head too fast for him to follow, so he stopped trying to figure anything out.

"Horrible, truly horrible," Harry told Hagrid sadly. "You were framed and you shouldn't have been."

"I have to agree with Harry, you didn't earn that, Hagrid," Draco told the half-giant, his opinion of the man completely changed.

"Thanks yeh two, thanks," Hagrid told them while wiping a tear from his eye. "Now, yeh outta be gettin' back to the castle before dinner. Up yeh go."

Harry and Draco left and went to the Great Hall in silence. The one thought flying through Harry's mind was that he had to write everything he knew down that night and try to figure it all out.

Well, this was a chapter to lead into the next one, which mot of you are looking forward to without even knowing it, but please realize that that doesn't make this chapter unimportant as everything is important in some way in this story. :)

Thanks to Arnel from SIYE for Betaing this chapter and going on past it to later chapters.

Please review and let me know what you think.

Posted: 2/16/11

Chapter Twenty-Two

Harry was still up even though Draco's deep breathing behind his own curtains told him his fellow Slytherin was asleep.

The parchment in front of him was full of pencil marks as Harry had taken to using pencil for everything but homework. He was making a list of everything he had picked up throughout the term, and it had taken over an hour to write.

Chamber opened 50 years ago

Roosters killed

Weird voice on Halloween

Spiders hiding

Petrified students

Myrtle died 50 years ago

Words outside Myrtle's bathroom

Can petrify ghosts

Can kill

Salazar was a Parselmouth

I'm a Parselmouth

The last two on the list, along with the weird voice on Halloween, had Harry thinking that the monster might just be a snake as he had been the only one to hear the voice, or so he thought, and he was the only Parselmouth in the school, most likely. That meant the monster he was looking for was probably a snake that scared spiders and couldn't take roosters; why else would the Heir kill the roosters? The monster would also be able to kill or petrify.

Sighing deeply, Harry thought about the Myrtle information. If Myrtle had been killed in her bathroom and the words were outside of the bathroom, was it possible that the Chamber's entrance was in her

bathroom? He would have to ask Myrtle how she died to figure out that one. Before that, though, he had to know what the monster was.

Ideas flying through his head, Harry finally got ready for bed and lay there for a couple of hours before he finally succumbed to sleep.

...

"Hey, Draco?" Harry asked the next morning as they both got ready for the day.

"Yeah, Harry?" the blond responded, looking up at his friend.

"Think I can spend the day on my own? You know I have my Cloak. I'll wear it all day if I have to, but I just need a day to myself during the break. It wouldn't surprise me if you want one as well," Harry told him, hoping Draco would agree so that he wouldn't have to give him the slip.

"Go ahead, but be sure to wear the Cloak," Draco responded after thinking about it. "Oh, and please don't tell any of the others I let you out of my sight; they'll kill me," he begged.

"Sure thing," Harry replied with a laugh. "Now, let's go eat breakfast."

...

Harry walked into the library and asked Madam Pince for books on snakes, telling her he was curious about the different types and not giving away anything more. She led him to a couple of books, one on non-magical snakes and the other on magical snakes. Once she had left him alone, he grabbed the book on magical snakes and sat down at a table.

Flipping through it, he saw they were in alphabetical order, so he just started from the beginning. It only took him a couple of minutes to come across a Basilisk. The page on it told him this was the snake he would most likely find in the Chamber.

Of the many fearsome beasts and monsters that roam our land, there is none more curious or more deadly than the Basilisk, known also as the King of Serpents. This snake, which may reach gigantic

size and live many hundreds of years, is born from a chicken's egg, hatched beneath a toad. Its methods of killing are most wondrous, for aside from its deadly and venomous fangs, the Basilisk has a murderous stare, and all who are fixed with the beam of its eye shall suffer instant death. Spiders flee before the Basilisk, for it is their mortal enemy, and the Basilisk flees only from the crowing of the rooster, which is fatal to it.

Looking at the passage, Harry realized that he was right. Thinking carefully, Harry also realized that none of the victims had looked the basilisk straight in the eyes.

His friends had told him that Colin had had his camera in front of his face. He himself had seen the water on the floor by Mrs. Norris. Justin had probably seen it through Nick, meaning he didn't see it head-on. Nick probably saw it straight-on, but he was already dead, and you can't kill a ghost again, so he joined the Petrified instead.

Figuring it all out, he quickly replaced the book on the shelf and hurried out of the library. He had to talk to Moaning Myrtle... now! Harry ran as fast as he could to her bathroom, and rushed into it.

"Myrtle? Are in here, Myrtle?" he called, hoping she was in there. It was a lucky day for Harry as she was in there.

"You're not a girl," she accused him.

"No, but I have to ask you a question," Harry told her. "I want to ask how you died." Myrtle's face changed suddenly from accusatory to pleased, as if she had been waiting to be asked that for fifty years.

"Ooooh, it was dreadful," she said with relish. "It happened right in here. I died in this very stall. I remember it so well. I'd hidden because Olive Hornby was teasing me about my glasses. The door was locked, and I was crying, and then I heard somebody come in. They said something funny. A different language, I think it must have been. Anyway, what really got me was that it was a boy speaking. So I unlocked the door, to tell him to go and use his own toilet, and then —" Myrtle swelled importantly, her face shining. "I died."

"How?" Harry asked, really needing to know.

"No idea," Myrtle said in hushed tones. "I just remember seeing a pair of great, big, yellow eyes. My whole body sort of seized up, and then I was floating away..." She looked dreamily at Harry. "And then I came back again. I was determined to haunt Olive Hornby, you see. Oh, she was sorry she'd ever laughed at my glasses."

"Where exactly did you see the eyes?" Harry asked, knowing that this was the piece of information he needed the most, the rest of it having just led up to this.

"Somewhere there," Myrtle said, pointing vaguely toward the sink in front of her toilet.

Harry turned around and began searching the sink from top to bottom, even searching the pipes underneath. Finally, he saw what he was looking for without realizing it: A snake carved into the side of the tap. He tried to turn the tap, but nothing happened.

"That tap's never worked," Myrtle said brightly. Harry thought she was taking this way too brightly, but he kept the thought to himself.

Sighing slightly, Harry realized he had to speak Parseltongue. Salazar Slytherin would make it so that only his descendents could get in, meaning those who could speak the language of the snakes.

"Open," he hissed as he looked at the snake carved into the tap, imagining it was actually moving.

At once the tap glowed with a brilliant white light and began to spin. Next second, the sink began to move; the sink, in fact, sank, right out of sight, leaving a large pipe exposed, a pipe wide enough for a man to slide into.

Harry pulled out his wand and checked to be sure that his knife and broom were with him. He had realized that if the entrance was in this bathroom, it was probably underground, so he had shrunk his broom and slipped it into his pocket that morning while he had put on his dragonhide belt with the dagger sheathed on it.

Without a word to Myrtle, he got into the pipe and let himself fall, sliding through the pipe silently, letting it guide him as it twisted and turned before finally shooting him out at the end as it leveled out. When he saw he was covered in grime, he used the cleaning spell

that Flint had taught him the year before for after Quidditch practice to clean the mud off his clothes.

Harry thought that he must be miles under the school. He took a step forward and heard a crunch under his foot.

"Lumos," he said to light his wand like a Muggle torch.

Looking down with his wand for light, he realized that the ground was covered in the skeletons of small animals like rats.

Ignoring the crunches now that he knew what they were, Harry continued down the path until he saw something ahead of him. Raising his wand high, he quickly realized it was a curled up snake skin – a twenty-foot long snake skin.

Gulping slightly as he realized what he would be facing if the snake wasn't contained somehow, Harry continued on until he saw a solid wall ahead on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds. The eyes looked somehow alive, making it easier to use Parseltongue.

"Open," he hissed again, and the serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves slid smoothly out of sight, and Harry walked inside, ready for anything with his wand drawn and the light shining ahead of him.

He was standing at the end of a very long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place.

Walking forward slowly, he looked left and right, keeping an eye for any movement, knowing he would close his eyes the moment he saw any. As he drew level with the last pair of pillars, a statue high as the Chamber itself loomed into view, standing against the back wall. Harry had to crane his neck to look up into the giant face above: It was ancient and monkeyish, with a long, thin beard that fell almost to the bottom of the wizard's sweeping stone robes, where two enormous gray feet stood on the smooth Chamber floor.

Harry looked around the Chamber, wondering where the basilisk was. He had expected to see it before now, but it was nowhere to be

seen. Then, he heard a voice, from which he could just barely discern the Parseltongue being used.

"Is someone there?" Harry thought that it had a slightly female tone to it, but he couldn't be sure.

"Yes," he replied in a hiss, Parseltongue beginning to come to him naturally.

"Who are you?" the voice asked. "I have not heard your voice before. You are a different Speaker than the last two."

"I'm Harry Potter," Harry replied. "Do you have a name?"

"My other master has never asked me that," the voice mused. "My first master, the one who brought me to life, Salazar, he named me Sebae. I am female."

"Can I know where you are, Sebae?" Harry asked, truly curious, but unsure if she could tell him.

"I am in the statue of my first master, unable to leave for one of my two masters locked me in here, unlike Salazar, and he only lets me out so that I go into the school and attack the students there," Sebae replied.

"So you don't want to attack the students in the school?" Harry asked Sebae, a bit confused as he had thought she would be enjoying this.

"No. Salazar left me here, asking me to guard the school in times of danger. If a Parselmouth was to come to me and tell me to do something, I was to do it," she replied with a bit of anger in her hisses. "My current master and the one before act exactly the same, yet they don't have the same body. It is confusing for me, but I'm following orders to go up to the school and attack the students."

"I am not allowed to kill students, though, so I fight the orders enough to only Petrify if I can. That one girl in the bathroom I killed many years ago was an accident because I didn't expect her. If I had, she would not have died."

Harry didn't know what to say, but he knew that he wanted to see Sebae and not talk to just a voice. "Is there a way to get you out of the statue, Sebae?"

"My master always says 'Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four' in Parseltongue and the door opens for me; it also closes with the same words," she informed Harry, obviously excited by the idea of getting out.

"Wait," Harry hissed as a thought came to him. "Can't I get Petrified or killed if you look me in the eyes in any way?"

"You are a Parselmouth, Harry Potter," Sebae hissed with a laughing tone in her hisses. "I cannot harm a Parselmouth like that. You are immune to it somehow."

"Oh, good," Harry told her in relief. "Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four."

Slytherin's gigantic stone face was moving. Harry saw his mouth opening, wider and wider, to make a huge black hole. Soon Sebae was sliding out of the hole and landed hard on the floor of the Chamber.

Then, to his surprise, something else came out of the mouth following Sebae.

A two-foot long dagger with emeralds in the hilt and the entire thing with snakes on it came to a stop in front of Harry, hovering in the air in front of him. A sheath followed behind it, made of emerald dragonhide and with emeralds and snake carvings on it too.

"What is this?" Harry hissed in disbelief as he stared, wide-eyed, at the dagger in front of him.

"That, Harry Potter, is Slytherin's Dagger, and you are its new master," a voice said in English from behind Harry.

Spinning around, Harry was almost face-to-face with the Bloody Baron. The ghost moved back slightly so that Harry wouldn't go through him and looked at Harry with a bit of a smile.

"Slytherin's Dagger?" Harry hissed in Parseltongue, not even realizing it as he had fallen into the habit of using it while conversing with Sebae.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Potter, but I was not fortunate enough to be born with the ability to speak or understand the language of snakes," Baron told him with a smirk on his face.

"Sorry," Harry told him in English. "I didn't even realize I was using it."

"Understandable after such a long conversation with Sebae here," the Baron said with an understanding smile now on his face. "Salazar used to tell me some of the most interesting things that she would say."

"You – you knew Salazar Slytherin?" Harry gasped as he realized what the Baron had said.

"Oh, yes, I was his most trusted friend besides Godric, and even then there were things he only told me about, like this Chamber and Sebae here," the ghost replied.

"Then – then why haven't you told anyone about this place?" Harry asked as he gestured around the Chamber.

"Didn't want Sebae here to be killed if I could help it," the Bloody Baron replied. "Besides, I knew you were a Parselmouth – heard you and your friends that day out by the lake – and guessed you would get the idea soon enough." The Baron paused, probably to gather his thoughts.

"I also knew you had to find this place on your own because the Dagger hadn't come to you yet. It must have known you could get down here on your own and was waiting for you."

"Waiting for... me?" Harry asked, shocked and staring at the Baron.

"Oh, yes, you see, Harry – may I call you Harry? – the Dagger may have once been Slytherin's, but it now has a charm on it, a very special charm," the Bloody Baron stated. "First, why don't you have Sebae curl up so that you can sit down on her; oh, and grab the Dagger and sheath."

Harry turned and slowly grasped the handle of the Dagger, and he felt warmth spread through his entire body for a moment before it was gone, leaving the Dagger in his hand. Then, Harry grabbed the sheath, and the same thing happened.

"Sebae, can you curl up so that I can sit on you?" Harry asked the basilisk. "The Bloody Baron is going to tell me about the Dagger, and probably Salazar in the process."

"Of course, Harry," she replied. "Oh, and I understand English, just cannot speak it, so I understood. I remember Baron from long ago. He sometimes came down with Salazar to visit me. The Baron will tell you the truth and all you need to know. I'll help if he needs it."

With that, Sebae curled up and let Harry sit on the outermost coil.

"She said that she understands English and will help you if you need help telling me the story," Harry informed the Baron.

"Ah, good, good, very good," he replied. "She remembers me, then?"

"Yes," Sebae hissed while nodding her head.

"I'm glad, very glad. Now... where was I? Oh, yes, the charm on the Dagger. You see, the stories about Salazar Slytherin have been embellished over the years.

"Salazar did not hate Muggle-borns or wish their deaths; he just wanted a House to be of only those who were from at least a part-wizard family so there would be one House to be sure to remember the old traditions and see that the other Houses learned them.

"He truly knew that in the future there would be Muggle-borns in Slytherin House, but he also knew he wanted them to be more Magical-descended witches and wizards than Muggle. Unfortunately, Godric, Rowena, and Helga took it the wrong way and thought he refused to have Muggle-borns in his House while he was still at Hogwarts because of their heritage.

"In a fit of rage as he left after a huge fight with Godric, he told them all, everyone at Hogwarts at the time, that his monster in his

Chamber of Secrets would rid the school of the Mudbloods. Now, he didn't normally use that word, which should have been the giveaway that he didn't mean it, but the others took it badly, and Salazar never returned."

"Wait!" Harry told the Baron before he could continue, and the Baron smiled down at him, obviously having expected interruptions.

"The Sorting Hat's song this year!" he exclaimed as the idea hit him.

"The story is coming out,
The story that will change all,
That only one will hear,
But it must be believed or all will fall,"

Harry quoted, having memorized the unusual song. "This is that story, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," the Baron agreed.

"And it's why all the ghosts went to you that evening after the song! They knew that you knew a story no one knew, probably not even them, and they guessed that you would be telling it to someone soon."

"That was the reason, yes," the Baron said with a nod and a smile that told Harry he was proud of how he was thinking.

"Now, before Salazar left, he knew that Hogwarts would be attacked sometime in the future, even if it was the distant future. Because he knew this, he told Sebae that she had to follow the orders of any Parselmouth that came in here or she met, no matter what the age."

"He also told me something else," Sebae added from under Harry.

"She says that he also told her something else," Harry translated to the Baron in confusion.

"I'll get to that soon, Sebae, don't worry," the Baron assured her. "Now, Salazar wasn't stupid. He also knew there would be times that no Parselmouth could be at Hogwarts for an attack, so he made a backup plan.

"The charm on that Dagger makes it search out a specific sort of person, very specific. You see, Salazar did not wish for the Houses to be divided as much as they were. No, Salazar wanted them to be united. Unfortunately, he realized it would not happen until after he and the other three Founders were dead. He had hoped it would happen soon after their deaths, though."

"Why didn't it?" Harry asked, curious to know if the Baron knew.

"Because of how everyone took his departing words. The words separated the Houses even more, and they've been that way until now." The Baron looked Harry right in the eye, and Harry realized what he was telling him.

"You mean until me," he stated softly.

"Yes, Harry Potter, until you came, the Houses were so divided that I thought there would be blood spilled between Slytherin and the others before too long. It does not help that most of the Death Eaters – Lord Voldemort's followers – were Slytherins. It caused people to look at Slytherin as a place for only dark wizards."

"Until I came and started proving to the other Houses that most of us eleven-year-olds were just like the rest of them, just with a different personality. That's all that separates any of the Houses: Personalities."

"But no one seemed to see that until you came along, Harry, and that is why you've made such a difference at this school. The teachers talk of you as the person in your generation to change Hogwarts yet again. There is always a single person who does that in each generation, and you're most certainly the one for yours. If anyone ever tries to claim that it was someone else, I'm not sure what I'd say." The Baron shook his head at the idea.

"You're a light wizard in Slytherin, which is not unheard of, but to the people of Britain's Wizarding world, it is something that is unexpected. Let's just say that you're sending a message to the people of our world here in Britain by proving that not all Slytherins are evil.

"I promise you, you've been making every single professor proud with what you're doing to dear old Hogwarts. Even more, you're

working to make it permanent, not just something temporary to end once you leave Hogwarts. By the way, those Journals are extraordinary."

"You know about the Journals?" Harry exclaimed. He and the others didn't want any professor to know about them.

"Oh, don't worry, it's just the ghosts, and we've all already made a promise not to tell anyway," the Baron assured him with a smile. "Your professors have absolutely no idea about them."

Harry sighed in relief. "That's a good thing!"

"Yes, well, back to what I was telling you... Salazar wanted the Houses united, and he wanted someone to always be at Hogwarts who could control Sebae here. He made it so that Sebae could understand English even if she could not speak it. Then he placed the charm on his Dagger to go to one person at a time in each generation, staying with that person until he or she left Hogwarts."

"What does that mean to me, though?" Harry asked, not really seeing where this was going.

"You can control Sebae more than Salazar's own blood Heir, Harry," the Baron stated.

"Seriously?" Harry exclaimed in shock.

"It is true, Harry," Sebae hissed. "You have my master's Dagger, which means you can control me more than my other master because my master wanted the one who held the Dagger to have more control. He seemed to believe that anyone who could own his Dagger would order me better than even his own blood."

"Is Sebae kidding me?" Harry asked the Baron. "Salazar actually believed that anyone with his Dagger would be able to control Sebae better than his own Heirs?"

"Oh, yes, he believed that if a person could actually earn his Dagger, he was an honorable man – or woman, I will admit, as Salazar expected women to get his Dagger as well – and would take care of Sebae better than anyone else."

"Why, though? Why would any person who had the Dagger do better?" Harry asked.

"Because, Harry James Potter, you are Salazar Slytherin's Chosen Heir."

Anyone see that coming when I mentioned the Chosen Heir during the Hat's song? *Smiles innocently* Well, I'm expecting comments on this chapter, so send them my way. I'll enjoy reading and replying to them, I expect. Oh, don't worry, even if I hadn't switched to twice a week, I might have just posted this on Wednesday anyway as I wouldn't want to keep you waiting very long for the second part. Look for it on Wednesday. :) Please review.

By the way, year four is done and I'm a good portion into the summer. How long it ends up depends on how much more I put into the summer.

Posted: 2/20/11

Chapter Twenty-Three

"Because, Harry James Potter, you are Salazar Slytherin's Chosen Heir."

"What – what? No way! You've got to be kidding me!" Harry exclaimed as he jumped to his feet, one hand holding the Dagger in its sheath while the other held his wand.

"The Hat's song this year," the Bloody Baron reminded Harry.

"The Chosen Heir is coming;
He will prove himself properly,
And the Founders will all like him,
For he will hold himself proudly,"

Harry quoted. "I know, I know! And I know that he could have been in any House just like me, but... How could I be Salazar Slytherin's Chosen Heir?"

"Because you fit the bill of Salazar's requirements to the dot," the Baron replied calmly, obviously having expected this. "I knew from the first morning of school when I heard you talking to your fellow first years that you would be the first ever Chosen Heir of Salazar Slytherin. I just didn't know when the Dagger would come to you, so I watched and waited.

"When the Sorting Hat sang its song this year, I knew, I just knew, that you would get the Dagger this year. I thought it might be that night, but it wasn't so I waited and watched some more.

"Then you and your friends were talking about Parselmouths, you being one, and the idea of Voldemort giving you the ability to be one like him. That struck me as odd and a huge coincidence, but I let it go, realizing that your idea was probably correct; how else would a Potter be a Parselmouth?

"The moment I read the note on the wall, I realized the truth. Salazar's Dagger was waiting for you to come to it, not waiting for the time to go to you. You, Harry Potter, had to find the Chamber of Secrets to finally claim the Dagger and learn the many truths of this Chamber. When I saw that list last night, I knew you would come

today, so I followed you from a distance and waited behind you until the Dagger claimed you as its owner."

"So you're saying that you've been waiting for a year and a half for this Dagger to claim me?" Harry asked as he raised the fist holding Slytherin's Dagger.

"Yes," the Baron replied as he nodded. "I knew I could not interfere, so I waited until you claimed the Dagger as your own. Salazar asked me to tell any Chosen Heir about everything, and to continue doing it. I think he knew I would become a ghost."

"So I'm Salazar Slytherin's Chosen Heir... What does that mean?"

"Like I've said before, you get to keep the Dagger until you leave Hogwarts, but even after you leave, Sebae will listen to you until death; the Dagger only leaves so that if another comes to Hogwarts, it can find it. Also, you control Sebae more than even Salazar's own blood Heirs."

"Also, if you had not already been able to speak Parseltongue, you would have been able to understand me when I spoke once you picked up that Dagger. It also would have informed you of where the Chamber was and where to put the Dagger so that you could get in," Sebae added.

"Is there anything else the Dagger can do?" Harry asked.

"I believe Salazar charmed it so that only his Chosen Heir could touch it without burning, though you might be able to give it to others; I wouldn't test that. Also, no one will be able to truly see the Dagger unless you choose them to."

"What would the Dagger look like if I used it to others, then?" Harry asked in English, not changing because he wanted the Bloody Baron to at least realize that Sebae was telling him more about the Dagger for him.

"Another dagger, a knife, or a pocketknife, I believe. Most likely it will look like the dagger that you are wearing on your belt now."

Harry looked down at the dagger on his belt and frowned at it before coming to a decision. He slipped his wand into the holster on his left

wrist before taking off his belt and sitting down on the floor of the Chamber.

Quickly slipping off the goblin-made dagger, he unsheathed both Dagger and dagger, comparing them. It was obvious with just a quick glance that the Dagger was more elegant, took much more work, and was longer. Both were silver with emeralds in them, but that was about as far as the similarities went.

Harry took a closer look at the Dagger. It had snakes engraved into the blade, like little snakes were burned into it, yet it was completely smooth, not a single bump in it. The hilt had snakes carved out of it, making the surface easier to grab and the snakes look pretty realistic. There was one large emerald in the center that went straight through from one side to the other. Then tiny emeralds were embedded throughout the snakes on the hilt, making random scales shine green.

Harry re-sheathed both before looking at the sheath of the Dagger. It had snakes literally burned into the dragonhide with emeralds as the eyes of the snakes.

Salazar Slytherin's Dagger went onto his dragonhide belt, which went back around his waist while the dagger from his vault went into a pocket of his robes, to be put back into the vault at a later date.

"Hey, Sebae, can you tell me who has been opening the Chamber and sending you out to attack the students?" Harry suddenly asked as he stood up and turned to face the basilisk, asking in English so that the Bloody Baron would understand his side.

"I'm sorry, Harry, but I cannot tell you anything except that the Heir reminds me greatly of the last person to let me free," Sebae told Harry with a tone of sadness. "Both use the exact same wording and emotions behind the words, but this one is younger than the last. Other than that, I cannot tell you anything."

"It's okay Sebae, that much helps," Harry told her before turning to the Bloody Baron. "Sebae says that the Heir opening the Chamber reminds her of the one who opened it last, which I know for a fact was fifty years ago, but this time the person is younger. Is it possible that someone is being forced to open the Chamber by the Heir from last time?"

"It is possible," the Bloody Baron allowed, obviously thinking it over. "None of the ghosts have any idea what's going on with the Chamber, not even me, so I cannot help you any more than telling you if I think your ideas are possible. This one certainly is."

"It's enough. Thanks, Baron," Harry said before he paused and thought about what the Baron had said. "Wait, does that mean I can talk to you if I want to?"

"Of course you may, Harry, but may I suggest not doing it unless absolutely necessary as it will attract attention to you. I only allowed a handful of people to talk to me like this, so maybe that will help you realize what sort of person you are. Now, I will leave you with Sebae here. I believe she wishes to talk to you. I'll see you later, Harry."

The Bloody Baron flew up through the ceiling and left Harry and Sebae alone in the Chamber of Secrets.

"So... Sebae, I can order you to do anything, right?" Harry asked just to make sure he had the idea down correctly.

"Yes, Harry, you can," she replied.

"If you are ordered to attack a student, you may not kill anyone, only Petrify the victim, even if it means disobeying the orders of the other Heir, got that?"

"Thank you Harry, for making it so that I may not kill at all," Sebae said as she bowed her head down in thanks. "I do not even wish to Petrify, but it is better than killing as you can fix them, so this will be better."

"That's why I did it," Harry informed her with a smile playing at his lips.

"Will you come to visit me?" Sebae asked after they sat in silence for a bit.

"After the Heir is found, I'll come once a month except during the summer, but not until the Heir is found as I don't want to run into him by accident and give this all away."

"Thank you. It gets very lonely down here alone. I wish I had more to do, but knowing I'll have someone to talk to for a while will be nice."

"I'll be sure to come at least once a month, then, but I can't chance anything with the Heir still using you."

"I understand, Harry." Sebae licked Harry's cheek with her forked tongue.

"I won't tell anyone about you, not even my friends. We'll keep you a secret so that no one tries to kill you."

"Thank you, Harry; it is nice to know I have a protector now."

"Always, Sebae, always," he told her quietly.

"Harry, pull out the Dagger, please," Sebae asked him. Harry did as she asked without question. "Now hold the blade up towards me. Good, now don't move."

Without more than that in warning, she suddenly bit the Dagger and then pulled away, not even giving Harry time to react. Harry then got to watch in awe as her venom was literally sucked into the blade.

"Salazar informed me it was goblin-made and that those sorts of weapons absorb anything that will make them stronger. He never thought of that, but sitting here with you made me think of it."

"Thanks, Sebae," Harry told her gratefully as he re-sheathed the Dagger and sat back down again.

"Go, Harry," Sebae told him as he sat there in silence with her, poking him in the side with her huge head. "You need food and people might be worried."

"You're right... I just don't want to leave you."

"I will be fine, even locked up as I am down here."

"Bye, Sebae," Harry said after letting her go up into the statue and closing it behind her.

"Goodbye, Harry."

...

"Where have you been? You missed lunch," Draco informed Harry as he finally slipped into the Common Room at around four in the afternoon.

"Lost track of time walking around the school," Harry replied as he threw himself down onto a couch and closed his eyes. So much had happened in the Chamber that he needed a chance to relax.

"Well, we'll be headed to dinner at five-thirty."

"Got it," Harry said as he rolled his eyes under his eyelids, falling asleep quickly.

...

"Happy Christmas, Draco," Harry called to his blond friend once both boys had opened the curtains around their beds and spotted the presents at the ends of their beds.

"You, too, Harry!" he called back before attacking his pile.

Harry felt that he got a good load of books, which his friends knew he liked so he got them often, as well as candy and quills. The most different gift was the pranking supplies from the twins.

Looking at the new books reminded Harry that he had that book on Occlumency he wanted to read soon, so he quickly pulled it out and left it on top of his desk.

...

"Wasn't a bad haul this year," Draco was telling Harry, the twins, and Ginny while they ate breakfast away from Ron and Percy. "Thanks for the dragonhide cloak, by the way, Harry."

"It was no problem. If you ask around, all of those with colored Journals got them," Harry told Draco as he gestured at the three Weasleys eating with them, who nodded in agreement with Harry's words.

"Anyone up for a snowball fight after breakfast?" Fred asked the table at large, including the other two Weasleys in his request.

The only one of the group to say no was Percy, who claimed he had a lot of homework still to do.

So, after breakfast, they all trooped outside and began forming teams. The twins grabbed Ron while Harry and Draco grabbed Ginny.

"You know what would make this even better?" Ginny asked suddenly as they were all making snowballs in the ten minutes allotted for it before the fight really began while Draco made a fort and Harry helped them both.

"What?" both boys asked her, knowing that her mind was sneaky enough to be a Slytherin.

"If we had some way to cut up this ice here and put it into the fort and the snowballs," she informed them, gesturing to one of the many patches of ice among the snow.

"I've got it," Harry told them both as he pulled out the Dagger and began quickly cutting up the ice. Within two minutes, all of the ice was in two different sizes: One for the snow to be wrapped around for snowballs and the rest to make the fort stronger.

Harry and Draco quickly charmed the ones for the snowballs to roll around in the snow, making the snowballs almost instantly. Then the three of them began adding the ice to the nice-sized three-walled fort Draco had been making.

By the time the ten minutes were up, they were ready and armed, waiting for the signal on the timer they had borrowed off of Professor Flitwick.

When sparks flew up into the sky, the three of them were throwing right at the Weasley boys and destroyed their fort within minutes while theirs was still standing. Half an hour later, Harry and Ginny were both the only ones still up for a snowball fight, so they agreed to make snowballs only for five minutes before fighting each other with the rest watching.

The moment the timer went off, they were both moving, scooping up snow and throwing it without any care, both just trying to get the other to give in. Both of them dodged, fell to the ground, jumped, and did whatever they could to get the other, though neither used magic.

In the end, the twins set off sparks and called their fight a draw, saying that the others were getting cold and wanted to go inside.

"This is over... for now," both Harry and Ginny said in the same breath, both panting heavily. It had been the most fun Harry had had on Christmas ever, even topping the Silver and Emerald prank from last Christmas, though he and Draco had been working on a new prank for this year the past week.

...

"Ready?" Harry asked Draco, who nodded. "Let's go, then."

Both boys threw Harry's Invisibility Cloak over themselves and slipped into the Great Hall behind Ginny, who had seen the look in their eyes and asked to be part of the prank; her job was to help distract the twins.

When Ginny had them distracted, Harry slipped something into their drinks and food while Draco slipped something else onto their silverware. Then the two of them slipped out of the Hall and back into the dungeons before allowing themselves to laugh.

"This is going to be hilarious!" Draco crowed as he imagined what they would see when they entered the Great Hall again.

"I know!" Harry agreed before they both slipped into the Entrance Hall and composed themselves before entering the Great Hall.

The sight that greeted them almost had them in hysterics again, but they managed to control themselves until they got to the table where the twins and Ginny were waiting, Ginny in hysterics and the twins looking at each other in horror.

Fred had silver snakes for hair while George had emerald green, and the snakes were moving all over the place. It reminded Harry of

the Greek Myth about Medusa, which was where the idea for the prank had come from. Harry's potion had been to change the snakes' colors while Draco's was to make their hair snakes.

Once they sat down across from the boys, Harry pulled out a camera and snapped a few photos of the twins before they realized what was going on, by which time he had already switched the film and hidden the one with the photos on it under his Invisibility Cloak in the inner pocket of his cloak. It reminded him of last Christmas, where he had taken photos out of nowhere and they had tried to snag the camera from him, but he had been too quick.

The moment the twins began to try and steal the camera from Harry, he and Draco gave in and joined Ginny in hysterics. Once the twins had realized that Harry had been expecting them to steal the camera, they sat back with a huff and waited for the three of them to stop laughing.

"Ginny, were you in on this?" Fred demanded once they had caught their breath.

"They only told me they had a prank planned for you when I asked them, and I wanted to help, so they told me to distract you. I had no idea the prank was this good!" She began snickering again.

"How long this time?" George demanded of Harry, who shrugged slightly.

"Same length as last time, maybe? I'm not sure about the snakes, but the color should last that long again."

"HARRY!" they both exclaimed in annoyance.

"You've done long-term pranks before, so why shouldn't I make my pranks on you long-term?" Harry asked innocently. "Besides, you won't prank me back for fear of worse retaliation. You both should be enjoying this. Imagine the looks on the others faces when they come back and see you both pranked again!"

"True..." they both mused together.

"Fine, we won't retaliate, but you've got to help us do something like this on the entire school for the End of Year Feast!" Fred told both of them.

"Sure, but Ginny gets to help as well," Harry said in agreement, earning a grin from both Draco, who had enjoyed the prank a lot, and Ginny, who hadn't expected to be included.

"Deal!" both boys said, taking turns shaking the hands of everyone at the table before Harry, Draco, and Ginny shook each other's hands as well.

"Now, let's go see what the professors think of this," Draco said with a sly look on his face.

"What?" Fred and George exclaimed. "No way! That wasn't part of any deal we made!"

"Come on," Ginny said as she stood up and dragged her brothers towards the professors. "I want to see their reactions!"

Harry smiled as today Ginny was definitely the one he had met on the train, not the quiet one. In fact, except for the train, this was the most energetic and fun he had ever seen her, though that might have just had to do with school.

"Professor McGonagall, can you fix this, please?" the twins begged, making the other three snicker, Harry and Draco louder than Ginny as they knew they needed Snape, not McGonagall.

"Again, Mr. Potter?" the Transfiguration Professor asked.

"Of course," he replied with a shrug and a smug smile. "I truly believe they need to be pranked once a year without anyone else being pranked. It keeps them modest."

Professor McGonagall snorted lightly once before pulling out her wand and waving it over the twins. She shook her head once before trying it again in a different pattern. This was repeated another three times, a new pattern each time, before she sighed and put her wand away.

"I'm sorry boys, but this isn't a Transfiguration that I know of, so I cannot help you," she told the disappointed twins, who now knew for sure what Harry and Draco had done.

"Thanks for trying at least, Professor," they told her in disappointment before turning to the Slytherins, an accusatory look in their eyes. "You had to make it so that we either talk to him or stay like this the whole time, didn't you?"

"Of course," Draco replied with a smirk while Harry just nodded, also smirking.

"Argh! You both are evil!" they exclaimed, making Ginny laugh.

"And you aren't whenever you prank someone?" she asked through her laughter. "They're just giving you a taste of your own medicine; keeping you modest, as Harry said."

They glared at their only sister for a moment before turning and rushing over to Snape, obviously begging him to help them from the smug look on his face. Harry could tell that, if he was going to help them, they would have to do some terrible things afterwards.

"This is brilliant!" Ginny exclaimed as she obviously tried to hold in laughter.

"Better than last year," Harry agreed with a smug smile.

"This time last week I would have asked if that was possible, but now I have to agree with you on that one," Draco said with a chuckle.

"Think Snape is going to help them?" Ginny asked quietly once they had all calmed down again and were still watching the twins beg their Potions professor for help, though they had all gone back to find some food as well.

"For a hefty price," Draco said matter-of-factly.

"Those two have caused him so much trouble with their chaos," Harry agreed.

"How long do you think until he helps them?" Draco asked the other two as he took up a forkful of turkey.

"I say in a week," Ginny replied.

"Last day of break," Draco replied before they both turned to Harry.

"Right after the entire school sees them."

"Willing to bet on all of this?" Ginny asked.

"How much is the bet?" Draco retorted with a raise eyebrow.

"Galleon each?" Harry offered. Both of them nodded, and they all shook hands on it.

...

Turned out none of them had gotten it right, though Harry was closest. Snape helped them the morning that the school was returned, though only after checking with his two Slytherins that there were printed photos they could pass around the school at a later date.

The twins were so relieved to be back to normal before their friends saw them that they had forgotten about the photos, which was a bonus for Harry, Draco, and Ginny.

The night before first day of classes after their friends were all back, Harry snuck around under his Invisibility Cloak and posted the photos in every single classroom, some on boards, some on desks, some on the floor, and even a couple on the ceiling.

By lunch the next day, the twins had been found out as pranked over the break for the second year running, and people were having trouble deciding whether to cheer Harry on or say he was the Heir of Slytherin, so they did neither. On the other hand, all of his friends made it known that they found the prank hilarious, cheering him up a little bit from his depression he had sunken into after remembering that he was basically hated by most of the school.

Unfortunately, Harry now knew that they were right about the Heir of Slytherin thing, though they thought he was a Blood Heir, not the Chosen Heir, which made it a bit easier on him.

Sighing, Harry went to sleep the first Friday after the break was over trying to fight the pain that being an outcast from most of the school brought upon him; not even his friends could stop everything the rest of the school threw at him, and they knew it.

A question I was rightfully asked in at least a review or two was about the Bloody Baron. The reason he doesn't know about what's going on in the Chamber (which was mentioned here but not explained) is because he didn't know exactly where the Chamber was until Harry found it. Oh, he knew the general area and what was in it, but Salazar never brought him down to it, so the Baron followed Harry to find the Chamber. Hope this helps.

Being sick on its own stinks. Add in being unable to sleep very well for two nights in a row, and you've got a very nice recipe for disaster. :-/ I'm going to post this and try to sleep even if it's almost 8 in the morning... Please review and make a sick teenager happy? :)

Posted: 2/23/11

Chapter Twenty-Four

The rest of January passed without much excitement except for the Slytherin versus Ravenclaw match at the end of January. It was an easy win for Slytherin with the Chasers racking up the points to two hundred before Harry caught the Snitch, Blaise only letting in three Ravenclaw goals.

Otherwise, Harry spent most of January trying to ignore the other students and doing his work. He was still thought of as the Heir of Slytherin, which bothered him as people were merciless about making him realize it with all the glares, sneers and snide remarks. Unfortunately, there wasn't much he could do about it.

It was the first week of February, and Harry was eating dinner when the first years came in without Maya.

"Hey, where's Maya?" he asked the first years.

"She and Luna had to use the bathroom on the way down from the library," Laura told him, obviously not all that worried, but the remark set off alarm bells in Harry's head.

"Which bathroom?" he asked quickly, knowing which one would be the quickest to get to.

"Moaning Myrtle's, they both said before they left us," Isabella pitched in, confirming Harry's fears. "Why did you want to know?"

Harry ignored the first years and his friends as he looked around the Great Hall, trying to see if anyone else was missing. He had almost relaxed when he saw Ginny wasn't at the Gryffindor table, which set off more alarm bells than the bathroom remark had.

Cursing under his breath, Harry watched as Professor McGonagall hurried into the Hall and whispered something to Dumbledore. He looked shocked and turned, probably to confirm what he had heard. When she nodded, Dumbledore seemed to sag in on himself, sighing deeply before nodding at his Deputy and standing up, looking between the Slytherin and Ravenclaw tables darkly.

"No, no, no," Harry moaned quietly, drawing looks from his friends that were full of worry.

"What's wrong Harry?" Tracey asked from across the table.

"Maya... Luna..." he groaned. "They've been attacked."

"What?" "How?" "They're both Purebloods!" "How do you know this, Harry?"

"Stop!" he called out, making them all stop shooting questions at him.

"Think about it," he then said. "Mrs. Norris was attacked outside of Myrtle's bathroom, the words on the wall were written there, and now Luna and Maya don't turn up after going to use the bathroom there right before McGonagall comes in here and tells Dumbledore something that upsets him and makes him look at the Slytherin and Ravenclaw tables darkly, showing he's upset. It all fits... They've been Petrified."

"May I please have your attention, please?" Professor Dumbledore called out to the Hall before Harry's friends had time to digest what he was saying. "It is with regret that I must inform you that there has been another double attack. Maya Pritchard of Slytherin and Luna Lovegood of Ravenclaw, both first years, were attacked and Petrified."

"You must all now be in your Common Rooms by six o'clock in the evening, no exceptions! Quidditch is canceled; there will be no more training sessions, and no other extracurricular activities will occur right now. Teachers will escort students to each class and the Great Hall, you will not go to the bathroom unaccompanied by a teacher, and use of the library is not allowed except for before dinner and during breaks and you have to be accompanied to the library by a teacher."

"I'm sorry to have to do this, but your protection is our main concern now, so desperate measures must be taken. If you are all finished eating, your Heads of House will take you to your Common Rooms. Thank you for your cooperation."

Dumbledore sat down heavily in his throne-like chair, looking every bit the one-hundred-and-fifty years he had right at that moment.

Harry and his fellow Slytherins all stood up and followed Professor Snape to their Common Room in silence, not a single person able to say anything. They all knew both Maya and Luna were Purebloods, which begged the question if any of the school was safe now. Every House had been attacked, and all but the Half-Bloods had been attacked.

No one said a word when they got to the Common Room but all went straight to bed.

...

For the next two months, the school followed those rules. The only thing that had truly happened that was worth mentioning was that Hagrid had been taken to Azkaban because of his so-called history with the Chamber of Secrets. Not a single person, even the Slytherins, believed he had done anything, but most found out slowly that Minister Fudge just wanted it to be seen that he was doing something.

It was mid-March before Dumbledore stopped teachers from escorting students to and from classes and allowed them to stay out until eight o'clock at night.

Something Harry had noticed was that Hermione was slowly putting together the pieces of the puzzle about what the so-called monster of Slytherin was. One time he had seen a parchment with notes about roosters, spiders, and Parselmouths on it; he didn't mention anything, though.

One day Harry heard Sebae in the walls of the castle, obviously using the pipes to find a victim for the Heir's next attack, and mentioned to a group that consisted of Hermione, Tracey, Draco, and Susan that he had been hearing voices around the same time as a few of the attacks from the walls, and he had just heard it again then.

The only reason he was mentioning it was to get them all back to their Common Rooms so that Sebae couldn't attack them. Tracey, Draco, and Susan went back to their Common Rooms, realizing what he meant, but Hermione said she was going to the library as she had an idea on the monster.

Harry was split between following Hermione or following Tracey and Draco. In the end, he followed Tracey and Draco, which was probably why Professor Snape came into the Common Room saying that Hermione and Penelope Clearwater, a Ravenclaw Prefect, had been found Petrified outside of the library with a mirror between them.

"NO!" Harry yelled once he and his friends were in the boys' dorm after Snape had left. Harry punched the wall hard and completely ignored the pain in his hand afterwards, preferring that pain to the pain in his heart from failing and allowing yet another friend to be Petrified by Sebae.

"Harry, you tried to warn her!" Tracey and Draco both told him, though in different levels of volume, as they pulled him away from the wall and sat him willingly down on his bed.

"It wasn't enough! She went to the library instead of her dorm! I should have gone with her!" he exclaimed before putting his face in his hands after throwing his glasses off of his face and onto his bed.

"Harry, if you did that, you'd be Petrified as well," Daphne said quietly. "Then where would the rest of us be? We need a leader right now, Harry, and you're ours."

"Maybe if I had gone with her she wouldn't have been Petrified," Harry kept on muttering, completely ignoring Daphne.

"Harry!" Tracey yelled, shocking everyone including Harry as Tracey rarely raised her voice, let alone yelled. "You wouldn't have done anything by going with Hermione," she told him more calmly once he was looking at her. "If you had gone, you'd probably be in the Hospital Wing with her, and we'd be without the leader we need right now!"

"But if I had gone with I might have been able to stop it!" he exclaimed, forgetting that his friends didn't realize he could control Sebae, let alone that he knew the monster was a snake, which meant he could talk to it and understand it.

"What could you have done to stop the attack, Harry, what?" Blaise yelled at him.

"The monster is a bloody Basilisk!" Harry yelled right back. "I've known since Christmas break, okay? If I had gone with Hermione, I might have been able to stop the bloody attack from happening this time!"

Harry looked at his friends after putting his glasses back on to see all of them but Draco staring at him in shock as they realized what he meant. Draco, on the other hand, was confused more than anything.

"I believe I'm missing something here," he said slowly.

"I'm a Parselmouth, okay?" Harry said sharply, though quietly so that no one else could hear if they were outside of the room. "The monster is a bloody snake that I can probably talk to and control if I'm at the scene of an attack."

"Bloody hell, Harry," Theo muttered as he realized why Harry had been so upset by Hermione being Petrified.

"You're a Parselmouth?" Draco asked Harry, who had put his face back in his hands again.

"Yes," Harry hissed in Parseltongue, too annoyed to do anything but actually use the language to prove it.

"Bloody hell..." Draco muttered quietly. "If the school knew this..."

"That's why we've been keeping it quiet," Tracey told Draco softly. "Keep it a secret, please?"

"Of course," he said as if he hadn't thought anything different.

"Harry, you couldn't do anything," Daphne said softly as Harry felt her sit down beside him. "You tried to warn her, then you went back to the Common Room to keep yourself safe; you did all you could at the time.

Internally Harry knew he hadn't as Sebae would never try to hurt him or anyone with him, but externally he sighed and said, "I guess you're right..."

"How did you figure out that it was a Basilisk anyway?" Theo asked from his bed across the room.

"I've heard it around the school, I'm a Parselmouth, Slytherin was a Parselmouth, which makes it quite obvious it would be a snake. The monster scares spiders because Hagrid told Draco and me about the spiders hiding in the Forest, and he's told me more than once this year that the roosters have been killed, which says the monster is afraid of roosters because there would be no other reason for the Heir to kill a rooster.

"Went to the library and looked up magical snakes. Basilisk scares spiders and the crow of a rooster can kill it. It's a type of snake, so it all fit. Mystery solved."

"Wow, you did that well, Harry," Daphne admitted.

"I'm willing to bet a hundred Galleons Hermione had just figured it out when she was Petrified, which would explain the library," Harry muttered darkly.

"You did your best, Harry," Tracey said as she sat on Harry's other side.

"Okay, okay..." he muttered before raising his voice to ask a question. "Has anyone seen Ginny today?"

"I saw her at breakfast, but she wasn't a lunch," Tracey admitted softly, realizing why he was asking.

"And Hermione was attacked right after lunch..." Harry muttered. "Could Ginny have something to do with all of this?"

"We need a way to find out without her knowing what we're doing," Blaise said when no one else was willing to admit that she was looking kind of suspicious.

"Harry should try speaking to her in Parseltongue," Draco suggested, earning looks until he said, "What?"

"It's a brilliant idea, that's what, Draco," Daphne exclaimed happily.

"If she understands me, we know she has something to do with it; if she doesn't, it won't matter that much as she knows I'm a Parselmouth," Harry mused aloud, realizing that Draco had a golden idea there.

"We've got a plan!" Theo said happily.

...

Unfortunately, having a plan and making it work were two different things as the next day Dumbledore brought back the restrictions, making it almost impossible to talk to Ginny at all, let alone without anyone but the five of them with her. It didn't help that Dumbledore was forced out of the school by the School Governors, who were so obviously blackmailed by Draco's father that even Harry and his friends had to give him a few dark looks of annoyance.

They worked at it for an entire two months before it finally happened.

One day after they all used the bathroom, they managed to drag Ginny away from the teachers a little while still staying in their sight to talk to her without anyone else hearing them.

"What is it?" she snapped while looking Harry straight in the eyes. Harry saw that they had red in them again, more than that night on Halloween, and they looked quite muddy, which didn't fit her at all.

"Hey Ginny," Harry started in English before switching to Parseltongue, knowing that she'd catch the switch if she understood, though it would take a few moments, which would be visible to the others. "We've been trying to talk to you for like a month now."

Harry watched as she opened her mouth to reply, froze, and then realization passed through her muddy-colored eyes. Then her eyes went harder than ever before and a slight sneer crossed her face, something that just didn't work on her.

"Why are you pretending to use Parseltongue, Harry?" she asked, shocking him. "I wouldn't let anyone else hear you or they might think you're the Heir even more than they do now." With that, Ginny walked back to her class and they left, leaving six shocked Slytherins in her wake.

...

"Something is definitely wrong with Ginny!" Harry exclaimed as they finally got back to the boys' dorm to discuss what had happened. "She knows I'm a Parselmouth, yet she acts like she has no idea!"

"Well, she definitely understood you and was about to reply when she realized that you had used Parseltongue," Theo said unnecessarily.

"Something was wrong with her eyes," Harry stated. "They had red mixed in with her normal brown; they looked muddy."

"Now that is odd..." Daphne mused thoughtfully.

"I've never heard of that before," Draco added, which really meant something as he was usually the one to know the most about the darker stuff they talked about, having grown up with his father.

"So we all agree that there's something going on with Ginny and that it isn't good, right?" Tracey asked to clarify, getting nods. "Then we need to keep an eye on her, I guess, the best we can."

"How?" Theo had to ask.

"Keep track of when she misses a meal, when we know we pass her in the corridors but don't see her, and that sort of thing," Daphne offered.

"Or... we could use this," Harry said as he reached into his pocket and pulled out the Marauder's Map.

"Isn't that the spare piece of parchment you wouldn't tell use about for the entire year almost?" Blaise asked with impatience.

"Yup," Harry replied as he pulled out his wand. "Watch... I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

The faces of his friends almost had Harry breaking out laughing as they saw the Map come to life for the first time, but he stopped himself by realizing that he had probably looked the same way and had just been lucky enough to be invisible at the time.

"It's a map of Hogwarts that shows every person in the castle and where each person is. If we just keep this activate and take turns watching it during classes and dinner..."

"We'll be able to keep an eye on Ginny!" Daphne finished with a smile. "Brilliant Harry!"

"Why couldn't you have told us about this earlier?" Theo whined as he looked at the Map in awe.

"And ruin the chance to amaze you like I did? Merlin, no! Besides, learning patience is a useful tool, Theo," Harry replied with a laugh, earning himself a glare.

"Oh, shut it, Harry," Theo snapped, making the rest of the group laugh at him. "Oh, be quiet! You all hated him for it too, you know."

"Yeah, but we're not the ones whining and making ourselves look foolish, now, are we?" Tracey replied with a snicker.

Theo just growled, making the group laugh even harder.

"Man, we needed that," Blaise said once they had all calmed down, Theo even joining in with the laughter after a minute.

"Definitely," Daphne and Draco agreed.

"Well, we have a plan and suspicions," Tracey began. "What should we do now?"

"Gobstones or Exploding Snap?" Harry offered, moving towards his trunk to get either game out, this being a normal ritual ever since the restrictions had first been put into place and then put back on after Hermione's attack.

"Exploding Snap," the whole group supplied.

"I think I got it, guys," Harry said with a chuckle before getting the cards out of his trunk.

...

The professors drove the children up the wall by informing them that there would still be exams that year despite the circumstances of the year. Because Harry and his friends had expected this, it was easier for them as they had been studying a bit for the possibility of it, but now they had to step it up since it was confirmed.

When they weren't studying, doing homework, or hanging out, the six Slytherins were taking turns watching Ginny on the Map. Nothing unusual happened; she went to class, ate at the right times, and went to the bathroom between classes before spending the rest of the evening in the Gryffindor Common Room.

Harry felt it had to be fate when he saw Ginny walking to Myrtle's bathroom one afternoon during classes while watching her on the map about three weeks after they had started using it. He watched as she paused outside the bathroom and stayed by the wall where the original message had been written before, moving from the left side to the right slowly, making him think that she was writing another message.

The moment McGonagall ordered all students to their Common Rooms and teachers to the staff room, he knew where he was going, and his friends knew as well because they made a circle around him while he pulled his Invisibility Cloak, which he had taken to always having in his bag, on.

"Good luck," Tracey whispered into the air where Harry was standing invisible, not realizing how much he would probably need that luck.

Harry slipped into the staff room with some of the staff and stood along the wall as they told him exactly what he knew, but didn't want to hear be confirmed.

HER SKELETON WILL LIE IN THE CHAMBER FOREVER.

McGonagall confirmed that that was the message Ginny had been writing before she took herself into the Chamber.

Harry sank down to the floor and ignored Lockhart as he entered the room and when they all left. He was trying to decide what to do, even though he knew deep down what he had to do.

His eyes flew open and he started when his Journal heated up in his pocket. Pulling it out, he opened it and saw that it was the colored Journal chat. Activating it, Harry just read what was being written.

Daphne: Ginny's been taken into the Chamber!

Theo: Snape came in and told us, but luckily didn't ask where you were, though we had a bathroom excuse ready for you.

Blaise: Where in the world are you?

There was a pause where no one wrote anything, probably hoping he, Harry, would reply, but he couldn't. Then, Tracey spoke.

Tracey: You'll be careful, right?

Harry realized she needed an answer, so he grabbed his pencil and wrote the reply, unable to make his voice work.

Harry: Of course.

Daphne: What are you both talking about?

Tracey: He's going into the Chamber to rescue her.

Theo: But we don't even know where it is!

Tracey: Harry's known since Christmas.

Theo, Blaise, and Daphne: WHAT?

Daphne: You've got to be kidding me! Why didn't you tell anyone! We could have stopped the attacks!

Tracey: Because he didn't know who or how the Chamber was being opened, and he didn't want anyone to know he was a Parselmouth until he knew that.

Blaise: How do you know all of this, Tracey?

Harry and Tracey: We're basically twins. It's obvious to us what the other knows.

Blaise: Oh... right...

Daphne: You'll be careful, right?

Harry: Of course. I'll bring her back.

Draco: Good luck, Harry.

Harry signed off and put the Journal away into his pocket before pulling his Cloak around him more tightly and beginning his walk back to the Chamber of Secrets for the second time that school year.

Thanks to those of you who wished me well. I got back to school Friday, and I'll slowly get healthier, hopefully. Also, I'm glad the prank amused so many of you. XD I was just having fun with it, but it was very nice to see all the kind reviews on it.

This chapter skipped a lot of time, but there was just nothing in the chapter I couldn't put in an overview, so I went with it. It'll happen here and there.

I had a lot of comments on having Ginny tell Harry about the Diary, but it couldn't happen. This chapter is the final domino being put into place, and the next is the first being tipped over, creating the chain reaction that leads to the end of the story. There are two domino chains in my series: Harry vs. Voldemort and Harry vs. Prejudice (XD). Those should both make sense, so I'll say no more than that this was a necessary action for the story, or I wouldn't have done it.

Please, leave a review. I don't bite. :-D Hope you enjoyed the chapter.

Posted: 2/27/11

Chapter Twenty-Five

Harry walked down the tunnel to the tunnel to the entrance to the Chamber, and wondered what he would find when he walked through the door in the wall. Would Ginny be awake, or would she be out cold with something else there besides Sebae? Could there be a third party in this entire thing?

When he stood before the doors, Harry held his wand in front of him and opened them, entering slowly and cautiously. He walked on until he caught sight of the statue of Slytherin he knew that Sebae was resting in. At the feet of Slytherin was a black and red pile of something.

Instead of running to her, he continued on cautiously, but he did move a lot more quickly than before. The moment he got to Ginny, Harry turned so that his back was to the statue before kneeling beside his friend and checking to see if she was alive. He could feel her heart beating slowly under his hand as he placed it over her heart and she was breathing shallowly; weak but alive.

A footstep made his head flash up, and Harry was greeted by the sight of a Slytherin with a Prefect's badge on his robes who looked to be around the age of sixteen or so. He had black hair that was arranged neatly and his face was pale; he could actually be called handsome.

"Who are you?" Harry asked, lifting his wand to point it at the mysterious Slytherin that certainly wasn't a Slytherin that Harry knew, and Harry recognized every student in the school by sight at the very least.

"I'm Tom Marvolo Riddle," the boy replied in a soft, smooth voice.

"So you did frame Hagrid fifty years ago; you opened the Chamber back then," Harry snapped as he realized quickly where he knew that name from.

While Harry was saying that, his mind was flying through all the information he knew. Tom Riddle opened the Chamber of Secrets the last time, only a Parselmouth could get into the Chamber, the only other known Parselmouth was Voldemort, and Sebae had made it sound like there had only been two other speakers who had

made her attack students, yet that sounded like something Voldemort would do.

That was when it hit Harry: Tom Riddle had to be Voldemort. He didn't know how he knew, but he just knew he was right, and that made it so that he might possibly be in over his head, yet he didn't care; he couldn't let Ginny die down here just because she had been used by Lord Voldemort.

"So you already know about my last triumph down here. That's very good," Riddle said while a smug smile came to his face, making it look a lot less handsome and a lot more evil.

"What are you, then?" Harry asked. "You can't be sixteen now, not when it's been over fifty years."

"A memory," Riddle replied, "preserved in a diary for fifty years."

Riddle pointed to a black diary on the floor right next to Harry, who was still kneeling on the floor beside Ginny with his wand pointed at Riddle. Harry blinked in surprise when he realized that it was the same diary he had seen Ginny writing in when she was not using her Journal.

"Ginny Weasley has been writing in it all year, and I've been writing back," Riddle informed Harry as he saw Harry's confusion. "She poured in all her deepest darkest secrets, hopes, and dreams, giving me a part of her soul. Then, I began putting some of myself back into her, just little tidbits of my life, supposedly trusting her with them."

"You've been possessing her all year," Harry realized. "All those times I saw her with red mixed in with her brown eyes, you've been in her mind, controlling her, making her open the Chamber and set loose the basilisk in here to attack the students. Now you're using her to make it so that you're not just a memory anymore; you're stealing her life force to bring you to life."

"Correct," Riddle replied, a bit impressed that Harry had figured it all out, if his face said anything.

"Why the Purebloods? You're supposed to be after Muggle-borns, Riddle," Harry asked, needing to know why Maya and Luna had been targeted.

"As a warning to the school that anyone can be attacked," Riddle said with a dark smile on his face. "It also was punishment for little Ginny, here, who needed to be reminded who was in control. She had been fighting me for too long, and I was tired of it."

"So Maya and Luna were examples and a punishment for Ginny just because she was being Ginny? Thanks for letting me know," Harry said with a sharp tone to his voice.

"If you must think of it like that, I guess they were," Riddle said with a nod, though it was obvious to Harry that he didn't think of it like that, nor did he care who lived or died as long as he won.

"What do you want from me?" Harry demanded.

"I wish to know how you – a skinny boy with not extraordinary magical talent – managed to defeat the greatest wizard of all time. How did you escape with nothing but a scar, while Lord Voldemort's powers were destroyed?" Riddle demanded, the look on his face telling Harry that he had wanted to know this for a long time.

"Wouldn't you like to know, Voldemort?" Harry sneered. "I think I prefer Tom for you. It's more fitting."

"Tom Riddle, the silly name of my silly Muggle father who abandoned me before I was even born because he found out my mother was a witch," Riddle said in disgust. "No, I wouldn't keep that name, so I fashioned myself a new name, one that I knew all of the Wizarding World would fear on day."

Riddle pulled Ginny's wand out of his pocket and wrote in the air with it, forming burning red letters.

TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE

He then swished the wand, and Harry watched as they reformed into new words.

I AM LORD VOLDEMORT

"So you see, only my closest friends ever called me that in school, but I used it even back then. Now it is feared as I became the most feared and the most powerful wizard in the world!" Riddle laughed quietly.

"You're wrong," Harry snapped, making Riddle shut up. "Albus Dumbledore is the most powerful wizard in the world. Even now you're hiding from him!"

"Albus Dumbledore has been run out of this school by the mere memory of me!" Riddle retorted.

"Ha! Dumbledore will only be truly gone when no one loyal to him is left at Hogwarts, and I promise you that it won't happen for a long while!" Harry laughed. "Besides, I bet he saw right through you back when you were a kid."

Riddle opened his mouth to retort when a song filled the Chamber and a ball of flame burst into being by the statue of Slytherin. Harry and Riddle both watched as Fawkes flew down to Harry and threw the Sorting Hat down at his feet before landing on Harry's shoulder.

"An old song bird and the old Sorting Hat..." Riddle mused. "This is the best Dumbledore can send his champion? Pathetic. Well, Potter, let's see how well you can do against the power of Lord Voldemort, the Heir of Slytherin, with the best Dumbledore could give you since it is obvious I won't be getting anything more from you."

Harry added silently: Lord Voldemort, Heir of Slytherin, against Harry Potter, Champion of Albus Dumbledore, and the Chosen Heir of Slytherin.

"Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four," Riddle hissed, but Harry could understand everything he said and was fighting back a smile.

Harry didn't even watch as Riddle freed Sebae but grabbed the Sorting Hat at his knees and stood up slowly, trying not to make Fawkes sway too much on his shoulder if he could help it.

With the Sorting Hat in his left hand and his wand in his right, Harry looked up at Sebae as she landed on the floor of the Chamber at the feet of Slytherin.

"Yes, Master?" she asked, obviously talking to Harry, but Riddle thought he meant her.

"Kill him!" he hissed darkly with a smug tone to it.

Harry let his lips curve upward slightly as he saw that Sebae hadn't moved a muscle, but he didn't move them much because he didn't want Riddle to see. Sebae wouldn't do anything to harm him, Harry, because he was the Chosen Heir and had been very kind to her.

"Kill him!" Riddle yelled at Sebae in Parseltongue, but she just ignored him.

Harry started wishing for a way to defeat Riddle, anything to defeat him. He just knew that he had to do something or Ginny would die, and he hadn't come this far to let that happen.

"KILL HIM!" Riddle yelled as loud as he could, getting very desperate.

Harry's hand tightened around the Sorting Hat in his left hand as he wished with all his heart, even the Gryffindor portion, for a way to save Ginny.

To Harry's surprise, something solid suddenly appeared in the Hat. Reaching over with his right hand, which still had his wand in it, Harry was surprised to realize it was a hilt he was touching, one larger than his Dagger, which meant...

Harry pulled out a sword with rubies in the hilt, and he caught the sight of two words on it: Godric Gryffindor.

Tom Riddle saw Harry pull out the sword and laughed a laugh that made it feel like there were ten of him instead of just the one, but Harry wasn't afraid.

Ever since he had found Slytherin's Dagger, Harry had been reading everything there was to know about the Founders, and he knew for a fact that Godric's sword was also goblin-made, which meant...

"Bite," Harry hissed to Sebae as he raised the sword towards her. Sebae immediately moved to bite the sword, and Harry watched as the basilisk venom was absorbed by the sword just as it had been by his Dagger.

Harry barely noticed the worried and confused look on Riddle's face when Sebae did as he had ordered while she hadn't listened to Riddle. All Harry could think about was that he knew how to get rid of Tom Riddle now. A dark smile crossed Harry's face as he met Riddle's eyes, and for once, Tom Riddle, a.k.a. Lord Voldemort, showed fear in his eyes.

"Goodbye, Tom Marvolo Riddle," Harry said just before he stabbed towards the ground with Gryffindor's sword, impaling Riddle's diary with it.

Harry, Fawkes, and Sebae watched as Riddle yelled out in pain and disappeared even while ink exploded out of the diary like blood. Ginny's wand fell to the ground where Tom had been before, but Harry wasn't even looking as he dropped to his knees beside Ginny again and waited for her to, hopefully, wake up.

Then, the redhead stirred, and Harry let out a sigh of relief before she opened her eyes.

"Harry?" she said weakly as she looked up at him before realization kicked in and she began to cry.

Harry lifted her up and into his lap, wrapping his arms around her in an attempt to comfort her. He ran one hand up and down her back while she cried, whispering words of reassurance in her ear the whole time.

"I-I'm sorry, Harry," she said once she had calmed down enough to look him in the eyes. "I-I tri-ried to f-fight him, but T-Tom was too s-strong for me. H-he wouldn't I-let me g-go."

"It's okay, Gin," Harry told her softly. "Tom Riddle is gone, his diary is destroyed." Harry pointed at the diary, which still had the sword in it.

Then Ginny looked up and saw Sebae looking down at both of them in concern and froze.

"H-Harry, there's a giant snake behind you," she whispered quietly.

"It's fine, Ginny," Harry told her with a laugh. "That's just Sebae. She won't hurt you." Harry paused as he realized something. "Did you just look Sebae in the eyes, Ginny?"

"Kind of hard not to..." she muttered darkly as she continued to look up at Sebae.

"Ginny, can you understand me?" Harry hissed in Parseltongue, catching Sebae's attention behind them.

"Yes, of course I can, why shouldn't I be able to?" Ginny replied, also using Parseltongue, though it was obvious to Harry that she hadn't realized it.

"Gin, this is Parseltongue, not English," Harry informed her.

"You mean I can still use Parseltongue?" Ginny exclaimed, obviously afraid of the idea.

"Gin, I can use it too, remember? It's not a bad thing."

"You didn't get yours from Tom! I couldn't do this before!" More tears fell from Ginny's eyes, but she wiped them away quickly.

"Yes I did, Ginny." Ginny looked up at him in disbelief. "Remember my idea of getting Parseltongue from Voldemort?" Ginny nodded. "Well, Tom Riddle is Voldemort, so we both got it from him."

Ginny gasped and looked at him for a minute before she realized that it meant they had something in common and leaned her head against his chest and let more of her tears fall, though these were more tears of release than fear or anything else.

"You're free," Harry told Sebae as he rubbed Ginny's back again, though she looked up when she heard him speak. "You won't be locked up in there again, Sebae; I promise I won't do that to you. You'll be free to move about the Chamber all you like."

"Thank you, Harry," Sebae replied before she licked Harry's cheek with her tongue.

"What are we going to do now?" Ginny asked Harry, not caring that she was using Parseltongue as much as she had before because she realized that it wasn't really a bad thing and that it meant she and Harry could talk without any other person understanding them except for Tom.

"We need to make it look like I killed Sebae so that they don't make us let them in here so that they can kill her," Harry informed her. "Sebae is here to protect the school in a time of need, not to attack students.

"Unfortunately, I don't think anyone will believe us if we tell them that, so we've got to make it look like I've killed her."

"How?"

"Hey, Fawkes, if I cut myself and let myself bleed over this sword, will you heal me?" Harry asked the phoenix that was somehow still on his shoulder; Fawkes just tilted his head to the side as if to ask why. "We don't want anyone killing Sebae here, so we're going to pretend I killed her." Fawkes nodded.

"Like so," Harry told Ginny just before letting her go and standing up, Fawkes still riding with him.

Pulling the sword out of the diary, Harry was thinking fast as an idea came to him. Was it really a good idea to put something with basilisk venom imbedded in it right into his arm? Not really, which meant the sword and Dagger were both out, leaving...

"Ginny, do you have your dagger with you?" Harry hissed, knowing that she would ask why but also answer his question.

"Right here," she replied as she unsheathed it and showed it to him. "Why do you need my dagger? You've got your own and the sword."

"They've both got basilisk venom in them. I'm not chancing anything with that in it."

"Good point," Ginny admitted as Harry grabbed her dagger from her.

Holding the dagger in his left hand, Harry stabbed it right into the crook of his elbow. Clenching his teeth to hold in any noises of pain, he dragged the dagger along to make the cut bigger before dropping the dagger and holding the tip of the sword to the wound, careful not to let it actually touch the wound, and letting the blood flow down it.

Once he thought there was enough blood on the sword to look like it had been stabbed through Sebae's head, Harry held out his arm for Fawkes, who cried on the cut. Soon after, Harry, who had been beginning to feel lightheaded from blood loss, was able to move a bit easier and went to kneel next to Ginny again.

"Now we just need a story," he told both Ginny and Sebae, knowing if all three helped it would be perfect. "I used Gryffindor's sword to stab Sebae through the skull."

"As you stabbed me, one of my fangs got stuck right where you just cut yourself, so the Phoenix healed you and made it so that you didn't die of my venom," Sebae suggested.

"Once you were healed, you took the fang, which broke off while you were stabbing Sebae, and stabbed the diary with it, putting the sword through it afterwards to make sure it stayed dead," Ginny hissed matter-of-factly, as if knowing Harry would use the idea without a doubt.

"And then I got the two of us out of here," Harry mused. "Not bad... Now I just have to figure out a story for how and when I figured out about the Chamber, because the truth will upset many people."

"What do you mean?" Ginny's face was a mask of confusion as she looked at Harry right in the eyes.

"Oh, I was here during Christmas Break," Harry told her off-handedly. "If Draco drove you all mad one day because I had supposedly disappeared, that was the day. Anyway, I need a cover story so that it looks like I only just found out where the Chamber is a few days ago at the most; knowing the monster is a basilisk isn't something that would have helped, so I can be truthful about that."

"You can figure that one out," Ginny said with a hint of laughter in her tone.

"Fine," Harry groaned. "By the way, it's great to have you back for good this time."

"What in the world do you mean by that?"

"Can you tell me your version of this story?" Harry requested, purposefully not answering her own question.

"I found Tom's diary in one of my schoolbooks after we went shopping and thought that maybe someone had forgotten it was there. When I got to school, I started writing in it, and I found out that someone wrote back, so I began using it more and more, putting almost everything I knew in there. One of the few things I didn't put in there was that you're a Parselmouth because it's just something I wanted to keep to myself.

"Then, I started losing my memory for periods of time; black spots whenever I tried to remember. One day before Halloween I suddenly woke up in my room covered in blood and feathers; on Halloween I had what looked like red paint all over me; then I couldn't remember where I was for each of the attacks." Ginny had tears in her eyes again, so Harry pulled her back into his lap and hugged her while she continued.

"That's when it began to hit me that I was the one attacking the students. When I figured that out, I began fighting Tom and trying to write in the Journals as much as I could. Those Journals might have been the only reason Tom couldn't control me full time all the time; they reminded me about why I was fighting and that I had friends. It was the reassurance I needed.

"Still, he was able to control me at least part of the time by the end of the year, so I've got a lot of black spots in my memory where I remember absolutely nothing, yet I somehow know all of the school stuff I don't remember learning if I ever think about some of it. It's like he was putting the information into my mind for me. The idea of it disgusted me, but I couldn't do anything about it!" Her tears finally fell then, and Ginny began sobbing.

"It's okay, Gin, he's gone. He won't be coming back from that stupid diary. Next time he comes for you, I'll be there to help you," Harry told her as she calmed down.

"I'm sorry I asked, but I needed to know for sure... Gin, I knew you weren't you because some days you would be lively, sarcastic, and fun while others you would be quiet, sullen, and looking like you were fighting something. A couple of times I saw the quiet you, your eyes had red mixed in with them. Those were the days Tom was controlling you. I'm just glad you're back for good this time, even if it takes a while to recover from this." Harry hugged Ginny to him a bit tighter before letting her go.

"Sebae?" Harry asked.

"Yes, Harry?" she replied as Ginny lifted her head up to look at the basilisk, whose head was now beside the pair.

"If something ever happens to Hogwarts and I send Ginny to bring you to me, will you go with her?" It was an idea that had just hit Harry as he realized that if Voldemort really came back and attacked Hogwarts, it would probably be easier for Ginny to get away than for him to.

"I will follow her to you if she asks," Sebae stated.

"Thank you, Sebae. Now... is there a way to make you invisible or something like that, yet still make it so that you can attack people?"

"I believe Salazar had a spell for it in his study inside the statue..." Sebae hissed thoughtfully.

"I guess Ginny and I now have something to look for when we come to visit you at the beginning of next year, eh?" Harry hissed with a bit of laughter in his tone.

"You – you want me to come with you when you visit Sebae?" Ginny asked Harry, looking up at him with a bit of shock on her face.

"Of course, why wouldn't I?"

"I just didn't expect it..." Ginny put her head back into Harry's chest as if to hide herself from him.

"Don't do that, Gin, please," Harry begged. "I really do want you to come with me if you're willing to come down here again."

"Thanks, Harry," Ginny said just moments before both of them winced in unison.

"Daphne," they hissed together with laughter in their throats. Harry then pulled out his Journal, activated it, and made it so that it was voice instead of writing.

Harry: What Daphne? You know I could have been fighting the basilisk when you did that, and it could have made it so that I was dead!

Blaise: She didn't think of that, I'm pretty sure. Her face is completely shell-shocked. Nice one, Harry.

Harry: I was being serious, Blaise... You have no idea how much that can hurt when it's Daphne.

Tracey: Are you okay, though, Harry?

Harry: Oh, just fine; I'm down in the Chamber of Secrets with a corpse of a basilisk, a Phoenix, a Sorting Hat, a sword, and Ginny. I'm just peachy.

Silence reigned on the Journal for a minute before anyone said anything.

Ginny: I think you broke them.

Harry: Me too.

Fred and George: GINNY! YOU'RE ALIVE!

Ginny: Of course I'm alive you idiots. Harry did just say that I was down here with him. Besides, can you see him doing anything but rescuing me alive?

George: She does have some good points there, dear brother of mine.

Fred: That she does, brother of mine.

Both: THANK YOU, HARRY!

Harry: Oh, it was no problem, right Gin? *Snickers along with Gin*

Tracey: We're missing something again.

Harry: *Hisses*

Ginny: *Hisses*

"This is hilarious," Harry told Ginny in Parseltongue so that their friends wouldn't understand.

"I know, especially the twins."

Draco: Why are you both hissing...?

Harry: That question isn't even worth an answer. Well, I believe it's time I try to find a way to get the two of us out of here. I'll see you all once Dumbledore is done ripping us apart for all the information he can get.

Harry shut his Journal and helped Ginny stand up before taking the Journal and slipping it into one of his pockets while the Sorting Hat went into another. He cleaned Ginny's dagger and then gave it back to her to sheath and cover up.

"We have to leave now, Sebae; I'm sorry," Harry hissed.

"Visit me soon after you get back to school, please," was all she said in reply.

"Of course," both Harry and Ginny told her.

Harry led Ginny out of the Chamber after picking up Gryffindor's blood-covered sword, barely paying attention when the doors closed behind them with a hiss. Fawkes flew ahead of them as they made their way to the large pipe that Harry had flown up on his broom last time, but he didn't have his Nimbus with him this time.

Just as Harry was about to say something about it, Fawkes held out his tail to the pair, and Harry remembered Dumbledore telling him that Phoenixes could carry immensely heavy loads.

"Fawkes will give us a lift back," he told Ginny. "Don't worry about the weight; Phoenixes can handle it."

Harry smiled down at Ginny and she offered him a small smile in return before they each grabbed half of Fawkes' tail and wrapped their other arm around the other.

"Get us out of here, please, Fawkes," Harry requested of the bird, which easily lifted the pair up and began flying them out of the Chamber of Secrets.

I'd have posted this earlier, but school, homework, and exhaustion do not go together well... :-/ Also, I swear, I didn't realize the last chapter was a cliffhanger until you all mentioned it in the reviews!

Well, how did you like my version of the Chamber? I even managed to get canon into it while being different! *Grins and snickers a bit* Anyway, I'm expecting comments, so please leave them in a review as I shut up now. :)

Thanks to Arnel from SIYE for Betaing. (Keep forgetting to add that on this site... :-/)

Posted: 3/2/11

Chapter Twenty-Six

Harry had to hold in a groan when he realized Fawkes had led them to McGonagall's office. That meant he would have to deal with the Gryffindor Head of House, who was about as easy as dealing with his own Head.

"Let's get this over with," he muttered to Ginny, who still had her arm around his waist while his was around hers. She snorted once before knocking on the door.

"Enter," McGonagall called in a voice that showed she was upset, probably because of all the Chamber stuff.

Harry pushed open the door and was greeted by the sight of two redhead adults, Professor McGonagall, Professor Snape, and Professor Dumbledore all in the office before one of the redheads yelled "GINNY!" and pulled her away from him in a huge hug.

Not wanting to interrupt, Harry slipped into the office and made his way to his Head of House, watching as Fawkes landed on Dumbledore's shoulder. Snape was looking at Harry with a calculating look in his eyes that Harry couldn't understand.

"How did you save Miss Weasley, Mr. Potter?" Snape asked sharply, reminding everyone but Dumbledore, who had been looking at Harry and not Ginny, that he was there.

"By going into the Chamber of Secrets and rescuing her, of course," Harry replied a bit cheekily, wanting them to ask real questions, not just tell them the entire story without pause.

"Potter," Snape growled. "How in the world did you find the Chamber, let alone get into it?"

"They both come down to the same thing in the end, don't they?" Harry asked, looking at Ginny to see if she agreed with him, which she did. "I found the Chamber by following little tidbits of information people gave me throughout the year and put it all together with the one thing that made it all make sense and got me into the Chamber: I'm a Parselmouth."

Harry caught Ginny's eye after he said that, and they both had to look away to hold in their laughter at the looks of pure shock on the faces of all the adults in the room.

"How long have you known this, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall finally asked as she came out of her stupor.

"Since the beginning of the year when I asked my friends what a Parselmouth was as it had been the password into the Common Room for a while, and the word meant nothing to me. Once they told me what a Parselmouth was, I realized I was one as I once spoke to a Boa in a Muggle zoo when I was ten, and we understood each other."

"So you've known this entire year that you're a Parselmouth, yet you told no one?" McGonagall snapped.

"A few of my friends knew, but why would anyone need to know I'm a Parselmouth? It's not like I'm the one who was opening the Chamber. I only went down there to rescue Ginny tonight, not to set the basilisk on other students," Harry retorted angrily, purposefully not saying that this was his first time in the Chamber as that was a lie, and he had a feeling at least one person in the room could read his mind, even with the practice in Occlumency he had been doing to protect his mind.

"Basilisk?" Mrs. Weasley – or that was who Harry guessed she was – gasped in shock before looking down at Ginny, as if trying to decide if she had been hurt by the basilisk.

"It didn't even touch Ginny, Mrs. Weasley," Harry said calmly. "Stupid thing went after me, not her."

"You had a basilisk after you and you're alive?" Snape asked in disbelief. "How in the world did you get out of there?"

"Stabbed it," Harry told them, lifting up the bloody sword still in his hand. "Straight through the head and everything."

All of the adults but Dumbledore were looking at Harry as if he had grown a second head, but Dumbledore was looking at the sword closely.

"Before you ask, yes, it is Gryffindor's sword, and yes, there is basilisk venom now imbedded in it," Harry informed his curious professor. "I'm also planning on keeping it, if you don't mind."

Everyone, Ginny included, looked at Harry sharply, all surprised that he had said that he wanted to keep the sword of Gryffindor.

"I guess there is no reason for you to not keep it as you did claim it, though how did you come by the sword?" Dumbledore asked.

"I pulled it out of the Sorting Hat," Harry told the group in amusement before pulling out said Hat and throwing it onto the desk in front of his Headmaster. "Very good timing as I was afraid the basilisk was going to kill me when it came at me."

"You still never told us how you found out where the Chamber was, and I also want to know how you knew about the basilisk and how you got into the Chamber," Snape reminded Harry from his right.

"I figured out about the basilisk months ago," Harry started, ignoring all attempts from the professors to find out why he hadn't reported it then, "but without knowing where the Chamber was or how it was moving around without being seen, I knew telling anyone would be pointless as there was nothing for any of you to do about it."

"On Halloween and a few other attacks, I heard a voice in the walls, moving towards where an attack happened. It took me a while, but then it all began to make sense. I was probably the only person besides the Heir to speak Parseltongue, and Salazar Slytherin was a Parselmouth, which meant that the most likely monster was a snake for the Chamber." Harry took a deep breath and looked around the see that he had everyone enraptured by his story.

"Once I had figured that out, I began thinking about the things Hagrid had been telling me were odd this year. Roosters being killed, spiders running away to hide in the Forest – it all pointed to a snake that was afraid of roosters and scared spiders. I went to the library during the Christmas Break and looked up magical snakes; a basilisk fit the bill perfectly."

"Unfortunately, I didn't know where the Chamber truly was until today when it hit me that if Myrtle had been killed last time in her bathroom. I asked myself; what if the Chamber was by her bathroom?"

You see, Hagrid told me about Myrtle before he was taken, but I didn't know what to do with the information, so I just filed it away. Then I began realizing that a lot seemed to be happening around that one bathroom; Myrtle dying, Mrs. Norris being attacked, the words on the wall... they were all done there.

"I went and asked Myrtle how she died after I found out Ginny had been taken down into the Chamber, and Myrtle told me about the yellow eyes she had seen by the sink in front of her toilet. Checking it over, I found a snake carved into the tap, so I told it to open in Parseltongue, and I was in," Harry finished, leaning against the wall behind him as he did, Gryffindor's sword in his hand with the point touching the ground.

"How did you get out of there, Potter?" McGonagall asked in disbelief.

Harry began his story by telling them about finding Ginny unconscious there and kneeling next to her with his wand in his hand. He told them about finding a sixteen-year-old boy by the name of Tom Riddle down there, wearing Slytherin clothes and claiming to be a memory preserved in a diary for fifty years.

At that point in the story, Harry threw the diary at Dumbledore like he had the Hat, and Dumbledore picked it up carefully, studying the diary before gesturing for Harry to go on.

He told them all that Riddle had been curious about him, wanting to know how he had survived when Voldemort tried to kill him, but Harry told them how he had already figured out who Tom Marvolo Riddle already was because of the information given to him by his friends: He was Lord Voldemort. Because of that, Harry didn't tell him anything but asked why Ginny was down there.

Riddle told Harry that she had been writing in his diary all year, pouring her soul into him, so he began giving some of his soul back to her and possessing her.

Harry had paused as tears appeared in Ginny's eyes again, and he went over to her, bending down to put his mouth to her ear.

"He's gone, and you won in the end; you fought him for an entire year and he didn't control you completely until the end," he hissed to her. "If you ask me, that means that you won, not him."

Ginny smiled her thanks up at Harry, and he returned her smile while grabbing her shoulder and staying by her as he told the rest of the story.

He told them all about how Tom Riddle had forced her to open the Chamber, kill the roosters, and attack all of the students. Maya and Luna had been both an example and a punishment, he told them, telling them what Riddle had told him. Then Harry went on to describe the fight with the basilisk that he, Ginny, and Sebae had come up with, ending with the fact that he and Ginny had talked so that she could tell him what had happened before they had flown out of the Chamber on Fawkes.

"Ginny," Mr. Weasley said, the first one to break the silence that had come over the room after Harry's tale was done, "that diary was obviously a Dark Object. Why didn't you show it to your mother or me?"

"Mr. Weasley, it wouldn't surprise me if Tom Riddle hadn't put a Charm of some sort on it so that Ginny wanted to use it, yet also tell no one about it," Harry told her father as he had felt Ginny stiffen beneath his hand when the question was asked.

"I must agree with Harry's assessment for that does seem like something that Tom Riddle, whom I taught here at Hogwarts fifty years ago, would do," Professor Dumbledore added, stopping any chance of Mr. Weasley continuing to tell Ginny off in any way.

"Now, I believe that we have four very worried Weasley boys," Professor Dumbledore said calmly. "Minerva, can you go collect them and bring them to the Hospital Wing?"

"Of course," she replied before hurrying out of her office and going towards Gryffindor Tower, or that's what Harry guessed.

"Arthur, why don't you and Molly take Ginny here to the Hospital Wing for hot chocolate and a check over? I believe those who were Petrified will be getting their Mandrake Draught as we speak, in fact."

Harry was confused for a moment until he remembered McGonagall making an announcement that the Mandrakes were ready and the Petrified would be revived tonight.

"Harry," Ginny hissed almost silently, something that no one in the room but a Parselmouth would pick up.

"Yeah?" he replied as he bent down to be by her head.

"I'm afraid to face them all," she told him. "I know most will think it wasn't my fault, that I was being controlled, but I was still the one who ordered Sebae to attack them."

"Gin, Tom Riddle used your body to order them; it wasn't your decision to order her around or to attack our classmates. Unless it was you deciding all of that without Tom Riddle influencing you in any way, it wasn't you, and our friends won't think that."

Harry wrapped an arm around Ginny as he finished, and she put her head on his chest and he felt more tears through his shirt. Looking up, Harry could tell that Mr. Weasley was holding his wife back as they both watched Harry comfort their daughter in a way they couldn't. With a quick shake of his head, Harry got Mrs. Weasley to stop fighting her husband and just watch as he turned back to Ginny and began to rub her back and comfort her.

"It'll be okay, Gin," he told her. "Maya, Luna, Hermione, Justin, Colin – they all know you, and they'll all understand that it wasn't your fault. Penelope... she's a smart girl, so she'll understand once it's explained to her. Please, Gin, you don't have to worry about it. They'll all understand completely."

"Thank you, Harry," Ginny hissed as she sat up and rubbed her face with her sleeve. "I think I needed to hear that."

"You're welcome, Gin," he replied as he looked up at her parents.

"Are you okay, Ginny?" her mother asked, obviously quite worried about her only daughter and youngest child.

"I'm alright, Mum," Ginny replied as she turned away from Harry and towards her parents. "I just needed to be reminded of a few things."

Her parents looked confused at that statement, but nodded as Ginny stood up and led them out of McGonagall's office. She turned just before she left and gave Harry a small smile and a slight nod. Those little things reassured him, and Harry was able to claim her chair and relax in it, the sword of Gryffindor still in his left hand.

"Potter, you acted like a Gryffindor would while also being a Slytherin," Snape stated once the door was closed. "How in the world is that possible?" Harry looked into the gray eyes of his Head of House with his emerald green ones.

"The Sorting Hat told me the day it Sorted me that I could have done well in any of the Houses, but Slytherin was the place I would do my best. I guess this House is the one to lead me to greatness. Oh, Gryffindor would have probably been the next choice had I not gone to Slytherin, but Slytherin is where I belong first and foremost."

"Severus, why don't you go alert the kitchens; I believe that a feast is in order," Professor Dumbledore interrupted before Snape could say anything else to Harry, for which Harry was grateful.

"Very well," Snape replied with a nod for the Headmaster and a look at Harry before he swept out of the office.

"You did very well down there, Harry," Dumbledore told Harry once they were finally alone. "Not many could have faced what you did and survived, even if you did have help."

"Thank you, Professor," Harry replied, waiting to see where this was going.

"Severus was right when he said that you were being a true Gryffindor down in that Chamber as only a true Gryffindor could pull that sword out of the Sorting Hat. I wonder what this means for you..."

Harry said nothing, deciding that Dumbledore wasn't looking for an answer anyway.

"You said that Tom Riddle wished to know how you survived when you were a baby," Dumbledore said out of the blue. "Your mother died to save you when she didn't have to; that kind of sacrifice leaves a mark, though not a physical one. The mark is of love, and it gave you a protection that Lord Voldemort did not expect that night. That was his downfall."

"But you don't believe that he's truly gone. He'll return eventually, and he'll come after me again," Harry stated, reading between the lines. "That's why you put up blood wards at my aunt's home and tried to make me stay there this summer. You think I won't be safe anywhere but there and here at Hogwarts. Basically, you're trying to control me, Professor."

"I'm not trying to be rude, but I'm going to be frank here, Professor." Dumbledore nodded for him to continue, the sparkle in his eyes gone.

"I'm a human being, not a chess piece or a weapon. When you learn that and realize I'm not someone for you to control, we will get along famously. Until that time, I will do all I must to stop you from trying to control my life. Please think upon these words and realize that I'm my own person. I've got my friends, my own plans, and my own life; I don't want anyone trying to change that."

"Very well, Harry," Dumbledore said softly. "I think you'd best get going to that feast."

Harry nodded and got up to leave when the door banged open and Draco's father, Lucius Malfoy, barged in, Dobby following him and obviously trying to polish his shoes.

While Dumbledore and Lucius talked about Dumbledore's coming back to Hogwarts when the Governors had fired him, Harry was watching Dobby point to the diary then Mr. Malfoy before punching himself in the head. It only took a couple of tries for Harry to realize what Dobby was trying to say, and he nodded.

Once Mr. Malfoy had left, Harry grabbed the diary after asking Dumbledore if he could have it. He quickly pulled one of his socks off and shoved the diary into it.

"Mr. Malfoy!" he called, making him stop. "I believe this is yours," he breathlessly told the man as he handed him the sock-covered diary.

Mr. Malfoy pulled the sock off the diary and threw it to the side, glaring at the diary. "How is this mine?"

"Don't you know?" Harry asked while internally cheering. "You gave Ginny that diary in Flourish and Blotts, I'm betting. Left it in one of her schoolbooks for her to find."

"You cannot prove anything," Mr. Malfoy sneered.

"Of course I can't, but I thought you might want the diary back is all," Harry told the man.

"Come, Dobby, we're leaving," Mr. Malfoy called as she snarled and turned on his heel to leave. "Dobby!"

"Master gave Dobby a sock! Dobby is free!" Dobby cried in pure joy.

"You lost me my servant, boy!" Mr. Malfoy snarled, whipping out his wand.

"You shall not harm Harry Potter!" Dobby cried, and there was a bang. Mr. Malfoy was against the far wall of the corridor, sprawled on the floor.

"You'll meet the same sticky end as your parents, Potter," Mr. Malfoy promised darkly.

"Sure I will," Harry drawled. "Well, I'm off to go see how Draco is doing, I believe. We have an alliance, remember? He's a great boy, by the way; you brought him up well."

Mr. Malfoy snarled, though there was some pride in his face now. He turned and left after picking himself up off the ground.

"Harry Potter freed Dobby!" Dobby exclaimed once his old Master was gone.

"Course I did," Harry replied with a smile. "Least I could do after you tried to warn me. Besides, no one is terrible enough to live with that

man. Just promise me that you won't try to save me by hurting me ever again, okay?"

"Of course, Harry Potter, sir!" Dobby squeaked.

"I'll see you another time, Dobby," Harry told the house-elf. "A bunch of my friends are being revived right now and I want to be in the Great Hall when they get there."

"Farewell, Harry Potter!" Dobby said as he hugged Harry around the middle before he disappeared with a loud CRACK!

...

"HARRY!" Tracey exclaimed as he walked into the Great Hall where all of the school minus the Petrified and the Weasleys were. Harry turned to see her running up to him and hugging him tightly.

"Hey, Trace," he said. "I'm okay, Trace, I'm okay."

Harry had stopped by his dorm to change his clothes before coming to the feast, so he had on clean robes and his dragonhide cloak. The Dagger and his wand were also with him, while he had shrunken both his broom and the sword of Gryffindor and put them into his pocket, deciding to never go anywhere without them ever again.

"Nice one, Harry!" Blaise told him as Daphne also hugged him and the boys hit him on the back and shoulders.

"You are such an idiot, Harry," Susan told him from in front of him, but he could see her smiling.

"You just had to go into the Chamber of Secrets, didn't you?" Padma asked him as she shook her head slowly.

"Of course!" he exclaimed as Tracey and Daphne finally let go of him. "Ginny was down there, and it allowed me to stop the attacks for good."

"How did you get into the Chamber anyway?" Terry asked him. "Your lovely Slytherin friends told us you might be willing to tell us that, but you'd never willingly say where the Chamber is."

"They're right about that," Harry informed him with a smile. "As for how I got into the Chamber... I'm a Parselmouth." Everyone was silent as they stared at him. "I'm pretty sure I got the ability from Voldemort when he tried to kill me and failed."

"That makes sense..." Padma thoughtfully said. "He died and something of his powers might have transferred to you... We're not sure what a reflected Killing Curse can do."

"So, where are we going to sit to wait for our revived friends?" Harry asked as silence fell again.

"Slytherin would be appropriate..." Tracey said slowly. "But I'm pretty sure we should sit somewhere other than there. Our House won't take all of us at that table very well."

"Is there a problem, Mr. Potter?" Professor McGonagall's voice asked from behind the group, making all of them spin around to see her watching them with visible amusement.

"As you professors have probably noticed throughout the year, we've been having trouble deciding where to sit," Harry said.

"We had noticed," McGonagall said with a nod. "In fact, there was a recent discussion about a way to possibly fix this for next year, and we've come up with one that will be worked on during the summer. Until then, this might be of service to you."

Professor McGonagall waved her wand and another long table, approximately half the size of the House tables, appeared between the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables, right in the middle of the Hall.

Harry and his friends all shared happy looks before heading to the new table while the rest of the school looked at the new table in confusion until they saw Harry's group headed to it. Once everyone had seen that, it made complete sense; it was a table for anyone to sit at.

Just after Harry had sat down with Tracey to his right and an open space to his left with another empty spot in front of him, the rest of the students with Journals began joining the group at the new table,

leaving those two spots empty as they had figured out why they were empty.

Soon, the entire table was laughing and having fun as it wasn't all that often that the entire group was together like this. Usually the group got together by year or just Harry's closest friends.

About an hour into the feast, which was a very odd one as almost everyone besides Harry was in night clothes, the doors to the Great Hall opened again and the newly revived entered.

The entire Hall stood up and burst into applause and cheers as everyone was relieved to see them back again. Then, to Harry's surprise, those closest to him literally dragged Harry over to the revived and then went back to their spots, cheering for him as well.

Ginny and the Weasley boys soon joined the group getting applauded, and Ginny moved quickly to stand next to Harry, realizing one of the reasons they were cheering for him was because he had saved her.

Harry wrapped an arm around Ginny's shoulders, and the two of them shared a smile. They had both survived the Chamber of Secrets and Tom Riddle; now, they had a reason to smile.

Finally, the cheers died down, and Harry led everyone except for Ron, Percy and Penelope who went to the Gryffindor table, to the new table in the middle of the Hall.

Ginny took the empty seat to Harry's left while Maya took the one across from him, Laura and Isabella on either side of her.

After that, the entire Hall was laughing and having fun as they truly felt that the Chamber of Secrets was done. Everyone ate and just had fun until Hagrid came into the Hall, getting cheers from everyone but the Slytherins at the actual Slytherin table.

"We knew it wasn't you!" Harry and Draco told Hagrid with smiles that he returned.

Harry was pleased when Professor Dumbledore stood up and told the entire school that Lockhart had run away, so there would be no more Defense classes except for fifth and seventh years, who would

be learning from himself. Almost the entire Hall had cheered when they heard that as no one had liked Lockhart once the idea that he was a fraud was known.

Even better, in most people's opinion, was that Dumbledore cancelled exams as a school treat. Hermione was probably the only one even slightly upset, but even she had to smile with all the happiness and excitement around the Hall.

The whole Hall stayed up all night, and then they all went to sleep at around eight in the morning, classes having been cancelled for the day.

Harry fell asleep happy and relaxed for the first time in a long time.

So, did anyone like the Dumbledore/Harry scene in there? Let me tell you, this is the first of many, many rounds, only a couple more written so far. As for Dobby: I just couldn't leave him with the Malfoys, could I? I mean, yeah, Draco could have freed him, but that would have made Mr. Malfoy mad at his son, and I couldn't make that happen. :)

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this. Second year has one more chapter to go, then it's onto the summer! :) Please, let me know what you thought. Please? Oh, and thank you all for getting me to a hundred THOUSAND hits! 100,000. :-D More than I was expecting when I wrote this story, I can promise you that. It was a very nice thing to see alongside the reviews for my first HP story. So... THANKS!

Posted: 3/6/11

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The last couple of weeks or so of the term went by well. OWLs and NEWTs were taken by the fifth and seventh years, the revived were filled in on everything, and Ginny was doing pretty well.

Every day, Harry and Ginny spent at least an hour alone, talking in Parseltongue about anything and everything. Their friends had been shocked and amazed to find out that Ginny could also speak Parseltongue, but they took it in stride and didn't mention it to her.

Their conversations always seemed to return to her nightmares. Harry would reassure her about how it wasn't her fault, and he would point out the flaws in the dreams. His words helped calm her down, and by the last day of term her dreams were much less intense, and she wasn't feeling as guilty.

The two of them planned to use the Journals to talk in Parseltongue during the summer once a day so that they could continue their conversations. With a bit of experimenting, they had realized that while none of their friends could see what they were saying, because they spoke Parseltongue and the Journals used their magical signatures to tell that it was them, they could see anything said in Parseltongue as if it was in English.

Tracey and Harry had written her father, and he had explained that the Journals read their magical signatures, which they hadn't actually known before then, and they had probably picked up on the Parseltongue through them, so that would be why only Harry and Ginny could read the snake tongue. Not even someone reading one of those two Journals could read it.

It was very interesting, and not even Mr. Davis had any idea why it was; he had just been guessing for the most part.

On the morning they were to leave Hogwarts, dorms were checked for last items, trunks were packed, pets locked up for the journey, and promises made to friends to meet up during the summer. Everyone was ready to go home for a couple of months before coming back to Hogwarts for the next school year.

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"I mostly had a flashback to when Tom was coming out of the diary," Ginny told Harry as they sat across from each other on the train when he asked what her nightmare had been about this time.

"So no more nightmares brought about by guilt?" Harry asked, feeling happy that she was finally basically over her guilt.

"Nope, second night in a row, too!" Ginny was smiling at she said that.

"You don't know how freaky it is to watch you two hiss back and forth to each other," Padma said with a shiver.

"It's like you two don't even realize you're doing it up to a point," Hannah added.

Harry and Ginny shared a look that Harry saw Tracey reading as well. Harry, Tracey, and Ginny could all share looks that no one else could read but them; Harry and Tracey because they were basically twins, Harry and Ginny because they knew each other a lot better now that they had been talking so much after that Chamber, and Tracey and Ginny because they were both girls and understood Harry so well.

"That's because they really don't realize it up to a point," Tracey informed the compartment on the Hogwarts Express with a snort. "To them it's just English, not hisses. They actually have to concentrate to hear the hissing through the English."

"Really?" Hermione asked, quite interesting in the idea of it.

"Yeah," Ginny said while Harry nodded.

"Fascinating..." Hermione muttered.

"Yes, well, I believe we still have another few hours before we reach Kings Cross," Harry began slowly, sharing looks with Draco and Ginny, "so I believe the three of us will be back shortly."

Harry and Draco had searched for the first of the last two weeks of term for a spell that wouldn't disappear with Finite Incantatem but

would go away over a few hours. Ginny had wanted to use her bat-bogey hex, but they had managed to convince her not to. This was their end of year prank because the twins had wanted to be kind after the whole Chamber thing and didn't prank the school.

So while Ginny went into the twins' compartment to talk with her brothers, Harry and Draco followed her in under Harry's Cloak. Once inside the compartment, they each raised their wand and whispered a spell they had practiced without using it on anyone for an entire week.

Moments later, Fred and George started to grow feathers among their hair, scales began to cover their faces, and fur began to cover the rest of their bodies.

"WHAT?" they both yelled as they caught sight of the other.

Harry started taking pictures through a gap in the Cloak before putting the film in his pocket. Once that was done, he and Draco left through the still-open door while still holding in their laughter. The moment they got back to the compartment with their friends in it, they burst out laughing, collapsing into their seats. Moments later, Ginny joined them, still laughing hysterically.

Their friends couldn't get an answer out of them when they asked what was so funny, but when the twins got to the compartment, they understood and began cracking up as well. Pretty soon, the entire compartment was laughing, even Fred and George as they saw what everyone else saw: It was a hilarious prank that the two best pranksters in the school hadn't expected at all.

That prank set the mood for the rest of the ride home because after that the entire trip was full of games and laughter.

...

"Mum, would it be possible for Harry to come over this summer?" Ginny asked as she dragged Harry over to her parents, the twins helping her.

"I'm sure we can figure something out," Mrs. Weasley replied as she looked at Harry. He could tell that she was fighting her instinct to say

that no Slytherins could come over, especially because he had save her daughter from the Chamber and her death.

"Thank you Mum!" Ginny said happily before letting Harry bring her over to Tracey and her parents.

"Well?" Tracey asked impatiently.

"She said yes," Ginny said a lot more calmly than she had been before.

"Probably has something to do with the fact that I saved her daughter's life," Harry added with a smirk as he poked Ginny in the side. "She was obviously fighting her instinct to not allow a Slytherin anywhere near her home." Harry rolled his eyes at the stupidity of the idea, yet it was true.

"You'll just have to prove to her that not all Slytherins are bad," Ginny told him.

"And here I thought saving your life would do that for me," Harry sighed dramatically.

"Shut it, Harry," Ginny told him, poking him in the side that time.

"So, which Journal did this lovely girl get?" Mr. Davis asked his daughter as he watched Harry and Ginny interact, catching their attention.

"The red one with the gold lining," Tracey informed her father with a slight smirk.

"Ah, so she was the first year that became a leader and joined the group of colored Journals... Interesting," he mused. "I can see why you chose her for Gryffindor's leader."

"Well, she fit the bill really well, so we got stuck with her," Harry said while Ginny stuck out her tongue at him.

"It's been nice to meet you, Ginny, but we've got to get these two home, and I believe your mother wants you back," Mrs. Davis told the three kids.

"I'll talk to you both with the Journals," Ginny told Harry and Tracey as she hugged him.

"We'll talk in the mornings and evening," Harry agreed for both of them.

"Bye!" Ginny called as she waved over her shoulder and ran over to her family. Harry and Tracey just waved.

"She seems like a very nice girl and friend for both of you," Mrs. Davis noted with a slightly pleased tone.

"She is," Harry and Tracey agreed.

"By the way, Harry, you're going to tell the three of us all about everything that happened in that Chamber when we get back, got it?" Mr. Davis told him as they left the train station and went to the car.

"Got it," Harry replied with a sigh, realizing he would have to use the same lie he had told Dumbledore again as he and Ginny had agreed to not tell anyone about Sebae, and he was going to keep that promise.

...

"So you're telling me that Riddle was getting clearer and clearer the longer you were in there, and that he only went away when you stabbed the diary with the basilisk fang?" Mr. Davis asked Harry to be sure he had all of the details.

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "He screamed and ink exploded around the fang like blood coming out of a wound."

"Harry, I'm going to bring Daphne's parents here and I need you to tell them that part of the story again; they need to hear about Riddle," Tracey's father told him.

"Okay..." Harry agreed slowly, confused as to why they were needed but willing to do what he was asked.

Mr. Davis left the room to go use the Floo and came back a few minutes later with Daphne, Astoria, and their parents. Harry then

told them all about what Riddle had said about being a memory, how he had gotten clearer over time, and what had happened when he stabbed the diary.

"Was that diary what I think it is?" Mr. Davis then asked Mr. Greengrass, whose face was very thoughtful and dark.

"If you mean a Horcrux, then I don't see it being anything else," Mr. Greengrass said in agreement. "I've heard of nothing else that could do anything like that, but that seems like something a Horcrux could do. Who is Tom Riddle?"

"Voldemort," Harry told him, not understanding a word Mr. Greengrass was saying but knowing the answer to that question.

"Bloody hell," Mr. Greengrass exclaimed as he paled so much that he looked like a ghost. "The Dark Lord had a Horcrux!"

"I'm willing to bet he went beyond the norm and made more than one," Mr. Davis said darkly "It just seems like something he would do."

"We've got to look up his past, see where he went after school, even during school, and find out what we can about his family!" Mr. Greengrass said, beginning to panic. "We've got to talk to people who knew him when he was still Tom Riddle, find out all we can. If we don't..."

"First and foremost we have to explain what a Horcrux is to the children, and then I have to take Harry somewhere. After that, I'll help you as much as I possibly can," Mr. Davis promised.

"Children," Mr. Greengrass said as he calmed down. "A Horcrux is a terrible thing. To make one you must commit a murder, then rip a piece of your soul off of the rest of it, and put it into an object. It will anchor you to life even if you die, but you will never be the same again."

"So – so Voldemort has at least one thing anchoring him to life?" Harry asked as he began to realize the implications of this. "He can't die unless we're sure they're all destroyed?"

"I'm sorry, Harry, but you're right," Mr. Davis told him.

"How are we supposed to find them, then?" Daphne demanded, her face as pale as anyone else's in the room, all of them fearing what this could mean.

"Your father and I will find out everything there is to know about Tom Riddle and his family, searching through his past and talking to people he once knew," Mr. Davis told her softly, trying to help them all calm down.

"When we know more about his past, we'll be able to find out if he made any more Horcruxes and destroy them if he did," Mr. Greengrass finished.

"How will you destroy them?" Astoria asked calmly, though it was obvious that her calm was only a front to hide her fear.

"Harry did well by using a basilisk fang to destroy the diary," Mr. Greengrass said, "as basilisk venom is among the few things able to destroy a Horcrux completely. We'll have to find more or use one of the more dangerous ways to destroy them."

Harry's head had flashed up when it was said that basilisk venom could destroy a Horcrux as an idea flashed through his mind, the Dagger at the center of it.

"What if I told you I know a way to destroy the Horcruxes?" he asked sharply, drawing attention to himself quickly.

"I'd ask what the way was and if you were sure of it," was Mr. Greengrass' immediate response.

"And I'd tell you that I'm completely sure that it will work, but I'm not going to tell you what it is," Harry responded. "If you find a Horcrux, get it to me and I'll send you it back completely destroyed within minutes."

"Yet you won't tell us how you're going to do it?" Mrs. Greengrass asked, speaking for the first time.

"It's a secret that not a single person knows about, and I've got it keep it that way for a good long while," Harry informed her. "I expect

you'll all know about it in the end, but I'm hoping it'll be a few years before I have to tell anyone about it."

"You're completely sure it will work?" Mrs. Davis asked to clarify for everyone else, who all seemed to be stunned into silence.

"Completely," Harry assured them all. "I can't explain, but it will work."

Harry added silently: It already worked with the sword, so why not the Dagger?

"Well, we have our destruction ready," Mr. Davis said with a nod in Harry's direction, "we have our plans for how to start searching," again a nod, though in Mr. Greengrass' direction this time, "and I've got something to do with Harry. I believe we've got a plan for now. We'll use our children if we get desperate enough to need to contract each other and we're not near a Floo."

After that, the Greengrasses quickly left, leaving silence in their wake as everyone tried to digest what they had found out.

...

"Where are we going?" Harry asked Mr. Davis as he led the boy into a lift in the Ministry of Magic, which Harry thought was amazing as he looked around the Atrium one last time before the lift went down.

"The Department of Mysteries, Harry," Mr. Davis told him. "When I became your guardian, I got a lot of paperwork on anything to do with you, and somewhere near the bottom of the pile was an old notice of a Prophecy having your name added to it as well as the Dark Lord's. Only those a Prophecy is about can recover it from the Hall of Prophecies, so we're going to recover it and listen to it back at the house.

"I wanted to wait until next summer, but with the idea of the Dark Lord having Horcruxes out, we need to hear what it says now."

Harry was silent after that as an Unspeakable met the two of them at the entrance to the Department of Mysteries and led them into a room full of little glass spheres. They went all the way down to row ninety-seven, and they were directed to a specific orb.

S.P.T to A.P.W.B.D.

Dark Lord

And (?) Harry Potter

Harry grabbed the orb off of the shelf, and he realized that it was warm, as if it had been out in the sun for a while.

Once he had the orb, Mr. Davis hurried him out of the Department of Mysteries and the Ministry of Magic, making sure that Harry never let go of the orb. Then Mr. Davis told Harry to Floo back to the Davis home, but he could not let go of that orb.

When they got home, Tracey and her mother were waiting for them, and the four of them went into the living room.

"Before we hear what that prophecy says," Mr. Davis started, "I need to find out if either of you knows that Occlumency is."

Tracey shook her head, but Harry said, "It's a way to protect your mind from people use try to read it using Legilimency."

"Very good, Harry," Mr. Davis complimented. "I'm going to guess that it was among the books you read at school this year from your vault." Harry nodded. "Did you practice at all?"

"I tried to do the meditation parts of it, and it helped keep me calmer throughout the year when the others were insulting me because they thought I was the Heir of Slytherin, but I didn't try anything with the organizing my thoughts or anything like that."

"That's a good start, Harry, and for this entire summer you and Tracey are going to practice Occlumency as well as start learning what I can teach you with those knives of yours," Mr. Davis told them both. "If there is anything else you have in those books you wish to learn that doesn't involve magic, let me know and we can work on it."

"How about sword fighting and hand-to-hand combat?" Harry asked as he thought of being able to use Gryffindor's sword, even if he had

to train with another sword. "There are plenty of swords in my vault that we can choose from to train with and hold on to just in case."

"The sword fighting I have a few books on and know a little myself, so I can help you with that, but I don't really know much hand-to-hand combat, Harry," Mr. Davis said, obviously realizing that Harry would be disappointed by it.

"I've got a book or two on both subjects," Harry said slowly. "And we could probably figure out a way to learn both on our own if we have to."

"That is true," Mr. Davis admitted. "Tracey, how do you feel about all of this?"

"I think it would be fun to learn how to fight, and it'll probably help us in the long run," she said, catching Harry's eye.

"If Voldemort comes back, we'll all need to know how to fight," Harry agreed. "Tracey and I can learn the basics and keep going, and then teach our friends whenever they come over. This way, we'll all be learning to protect ourselves and get to do something interesting with our friends."

"Very well," Mr. Davis agreed. "We'll figure out how to make that happen later, but for now, we've got a Prophecy to listen to."

Harry looked down at the orb in his hand as he stood up, clenching his hand around it tighter as he realized that this orb could be the very reason that Voldemort had come after him when he had been a baby, why his parents were dead.

Without any warning at all, Harry threw the orb at the ground and watched it smash. Then, a figure, as pearly white as a ghost, fluid as smoke, unfurled itself from the fragments of glass before speaking.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Once the orb fell silent, Harry collapsed and Tracey was barely quick enough to catch him and make him sit on the couch next to her, his head on her shoulder.

"They died because of that Prophecy!" he said softly as it all sank in. "They died because Voldemort thought that I was the only one who could kill him. He must not have heard the entire thing because he wouldn't have attacked otherwise. They died because of a stupid mistake on Voldemort's part!"

Harry was in tears as it all hit him hard, like a physical blow to the heart.

"I'm going to have to kill him or be killed by him," he continued. "He's already ruined my childhood by killing my parents, and now I might die by his hand, or cor, I'll become a murderer because I'm the only bloody person in the world who can finally kill him for good."

Harry barely paid attention as he heard Mrs. Davis get up off the couch and go into the other room to use the Floo. He barely heard a thing when someone came through the Floo. It took another hand being placed on his back for him to realize that someone else was there.

"Harry, it'll be okay," he heard Ginny hiss in Parseltongue, calming him almost instantly.

"How can it be okay?" he asked her as he sat up and looked at her through his smudged glasses and tear-filled eyes. "I'm either going to be killed by him or have to kill him. Murderer or murdered."

Harry felt Tracey put an arm around his waist while he talked to Ginny. He realized that it must have been Tracey who had told her mother to go get Ginny, knowing that she'd be the best person to calm him down between her Parseltongue and understanding of dealing with Voldemort.

"Because it will be self-defense to stop him from killing you," she told him calmly. "And it'll be to stop him from killing other people, not because you enjoy it. That is what makes you better than Voldemort; he kills for fun and enjoyment while you'll only be doing it in self-defense or to protect loved ones, friends, and the innocent."

"What if I'm facing him and can't do it? What if I can't kill him and others die because of me? What if people die while I'm not ready to kill him; will their deaths be my fault?" Harry asked her, telling her all of his largest fears that had been flowing through his mind since hearing the Prophecy.

"You'll face him and be able to defeat him because you'll have your friends with you, you'll have a reason to live while he will not. And if people die while the time isn't right, then the deaths will be Tom's fault, not yours. You'll be doing your best, but you're still only twelve; you can't do everything. If people die in the process of defeating him, they die for a good cause and because of him, not because of you."

"Thanks, Gin," he told her quietly after thinking about it and taking a deep breath.

"You needed someone to return you to normal," Ginny told him in English with a smirk. "I'm just glad I was able to help."

"I asked Mum to get you because I was pretty sure you'd be the only one to snap some sense into him," Tracey informed her happily.

"How did you get your mum to let you come over here, anyway?" Harry asked as he wiped his face and glasses off with his shirt.

"Oh, she asked the twins and me to tell her our own stories of you from this year and last year once we got home," Ginny replied. "Ron was sent out of the house with Percy to go de-gnome the yard so that he wouldn't try to mess up the stories."

"After hearing our stories, Mum and Dad realized that they had had the wrong idea of you, and Slytherins in general. It took us showing them that you really are just normal kids for them to realize that not letting us see any of you in the summer was like not letting Ron see his friends. So when your mum asked if I could come over to help Harry with something, she let me go," she finished.

"That's a good thing," Harry said, relieved he wouldn't have to prove anything to Ginny's parents now.

"Oh, yeah," Ginny agreed. "But I'm done here and Mum said I had to go back once I was done, so I'll see you both sometime soon."

"See ya, Gin," Harry called after her as she went towards the Floo.

"Bye, Ginny!" Tracey also called after the redhead right before she stepped into the Floo.

Ginny gave them one last wave and then disappeared.

This was more of the transition to summer with the end of the school year at the beginning, but it also is how I show you my plans for the Horcruxes, in a way. You will find that I, along with most of the FF authors writing something like this, prefer not to waste a perfectly good school year by forcing Harry on a wild goose chase when I could have him in his seventh year of Hogwarts. I hope you found this introduction to the idea at least somewhat interesting and informative.

I'd have posted this earlier, but I had to make up a Chemistry test after school because of so many missed days, and as I write this I'm fighting off the urge to take a nap after a long day of forcing myself not to speak a single word. Please, if someone would like to chat, do so because, even if it's typing, I've been deprived of conversation as it's hard to chat when one person is speaking and the other writing on a white board because only the silent person knows sign language. :(

Posted: 3/9/11 (2011 ASL Silent Day. :D)

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Most of the next month or so of summer went by in the same way almost every day.

Every morning, Harry and Tracey would wake up and see which of their friends with colored Journals were awake in the morning and talk with them for a bit before going to eat breakfast. After eating, they would go to their own rooms and work on their summer homework while talking in the group chat, bringing in anyone that wanted to join a huge conversation into the chat.

It was during the morning conversations that Harry and Ginny would usually have their daily conversations. Some testing just after school had ended showed that the two of them could actually understand it when they used Parseltongue through the Journals, but no one else could, not even if they read one of their Journals.

When Mr. Davis was consulted, he informed the young teens that the Journals were charmed to feed off of their magical signature as it was how the Journal knew to only open for the owner. His guess was that the Journal had picked up the Parseltongue through their signatures and allowed any Parselmouth that could read the Journals to understand it, which was basically proven one afternoon after training when Harry and Ginny had started talking in Parseltongue while Tracey was using her Journal with the others and the two could both read the snake language they had been talking in on her Journal while even she couldn't.

After lunch, Tracey's father would teach them both how to use their knives, though Harry was using Slytherin's Dagger whenever the two of them weren't sparring with the knives, and his Goblin-made knife when they were. About a week into the summer, Harry, Tracey, and her father went to Gringotts and got a bunch of swords from his vault and added sword training to their afternoon lessons.

Sometimes, during the lessons, a few of their friends joined them, learning the basics from Harry and Tracey more than Mr. Davis, as he felt teaching others would help them more than watching him teach their friends.

It was only after two weeks into the summer, when Harry and Tracey had a good grasp on using their knives and had begun learning to

use the swords from Harry's vault, that Mr. Davis began teaching them the little he knew of hand-to-hand combat and finding any friends who might know more. He had found a couple of friends who had practiced the art, and they both were quite willing to teach the pair and their friends.

Ginny and the twins were normal visitors, though strict rules had been given to the twins, making it so that any pranks were kept inside of the training area so that the house wasn't destroyed. Plus, Harry and his four Slytherin friends had spotted that the twins could use pranks to fight if they had to, which had both surprised and pleased the two boys before they began planning ways to use their pranks to fight.

Ginny had picked up on the different methods of fighting as fast as Harry had, which didn't surprise anyone as both were small, fast, and quite willing to learn. In fact, it was their size and speed that made it so that most of the others didn't want to spar with either of them unless forced to.

Astoria, Daphne's younger sister, was learning almost as fast as Harry and Ginny because she was the youngest of the group learning. This had worried Daphne until she realized it was probably a good idea seeing as Astoria would be going to Hogwarts in autumn. Astoria had been keeping in contact with only Daphne throughout the year using the Journals as Daphne didn't really tell anyone when she contacted her sister.

After training Harry and Tracey used the hour before dinner learning Occlumency, which involved a lot of meditation in the beginning so that they could both learn how to calm themselves easier. Once they had learned that pretty well, they began going through their memories and kind of sorting them, though it was more remembering things and imagining them shifting around in their minds.

After that was done, the pair had begun to picture walls or something protecting their memories and thoughts before even trying to protect their minds alone. They were quickly progressing to the point where Mr. Davis would be trying to break into their minds to see how well their shields held and then point out their faults.

Weekends were spent swimming, flying for fun, playing Quidditch, going to friends' houses, and having friends over. There were many weekends that the Davis house was full of second years, a few first years, and the twins. Actually, there were many nights in general where there was a group of children all sleeping over and then joining in on the training the next afternoon before heading home. Harry had never had so much fun during the summer.

Around halfway through July, two things happened. The first was the Weasleys winning a bunch of money and going on a trip to visit their eldest brother, or son Bill, over down in Egypt, where he was a Curse Breaker for Gringotts. The second event happened days after the article came out about it in the newspaper with a picture of the family in it: Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban Prison.

Harry didn't understand why this was such a big deal at first, but then Draco signed onto his Journal and talked to Harry, who had Tracey reading and commenting over his shoulder, and then he understood...

...

Draco: Harry! Good, you're still on the Journal!

Harry: Tracey and I were just going to go grab some breakfast; what's going on Draco?

Draco: We've got a major problem. Sirius Black has escaped from Azkaban!

Tracey: *Gasp* But that's impossible!

Draco: I know! Oh, Tracey, you're there, too?

Harry: *Dryly states* She's standing behind me and reading over my shoulder. Now, can someone please inform me what in Merlin's name Azkaban is and who Sirius Black is?

Tracey: Sorry, Harry, I forgot you didn't know. Azkaban is the Wizarding Prison, which no one has ever escaped from – ever. That's why this is so shocking.

Draco: As for who Sirius Black is, that's why I got on. My father told me just a few minutes ago, and I knew you had to hear the story, Harry.

Harry: I'm reading.

Draco: My father told me that Sirius Black was a major follower of the Dark Lord. More importantly, he was a spy and a traitor. You see, he had one best friend from Hogwarts and afterwards, just one: James Potter.

Harry: *Gasps* My FATHER?

Draco: Yeah... You see, your parents went into hiding with you under the Fidelius Charm, and Sirius Black was their Secret Keeper.

Harry: Something about a charm that hid my parents and a Secret Keeper...

Tracey: A Fidelius Charm basically is a Charm that allows a person, a group of people, or an entire building to be hidden completely, unable to be found, unless one person – the Secret Keeper – tells another person where it is. The whole secret of where the place is hidden is given to a single person, just one. The Dark Lord could have been looking in your living room window and not seen you unless the Secret Keeper had told him where you were.

Draco: Basically, Sirius Black told the Dark Lord where your parents were, and that allowed him to find you all and kill your parents before trying to kill you that Halloween night.

Harry: So Sirius Black is the reason I have no parents? And he just escaped from a prison that has never been broken out of?

Draco: Oh, it gets worse... He murdered thirteen people with a single spell and just laughed about it as the Aurors went and brought him in.

Harry: Again, he is the reason I have no parents and he just escaped from prison?

Tracey: Harry, how are you being so calm about this?

Harry: *Shrugs slightly* Occlumency must be working. Besides, I'm actually fighting to hold in my anger; it's barely working right now. Truthfully, there's no reason for me to go after him; he'll come to me, the Aurors will catch him, or he'll just run and hide.

Daphne: At least you're being Slytherin about this and not Gryffindor.

Draco: Daphne! When did you sign in?

Daphne: Just as you finished telling Harry here Black's story.

Tracey: Uh... Really sorry about this, but mum is calling us.

Harry: Thanks for filling me in, though, Draco. I really appreciate it.

Draco: No problem, Harry. Talk to you another time.

...

"I gather you've heard," Mr. Davis stated matter-of-factly as Harry and Tracey finally made it downstairs for breakfast.

"Draco was telling us while we were upstairs," Harry informed him. Training with an Auror did have some merits as he could get some good books on different forms of fighting when he tried.

"Well, your mother and I were talking when we saw the news in the paper," the man began as the almost-thirteen-year-olds sat down and began filling their plates with food, "and we decided that you and your friends need another form of protection, even if it will take a long while for all of you to learn."

"What, Daddy?" Tracey asked as she swallowed a mouthful of eggs.

"We're going to brew each of you the Animagus potion, starting this morning after breakfast, and all of the friends you choose will work to become Animagi," he replied, smiling as he saw the wide-eye looks and open mouths of the children in front of him.

"Seriously?" Harry exclaimed, remembering the book he had skimmed on the subject, having never expected the chance to actually become one.

"If any of you get into a tight spot, having an ability no one knows about will make it much easier for you to get out of it," Mrs. Davis informed them both she sat down at the table with a cup of tea in her hands.

Harry and Tracey shared a look, both of them agreeing in that same look who was going to be learning this brilliant ability along with them. It wasn't that hard for them to decide, really, as the Journals gave it away, in a way.

"All of our friends with colored Journals," Harry stated as the two both looked up at Tracey's parents, who were smiling knowingly at them both when they heard the answer.

"Just as we suspected," Mrs. Davis admitted. "They seem to be your closest friends and the most likely to be willing to put in the effort."

"Willing?" Tracey asked in astonishment. "Are you kidding me? They're all going to go ballistic when they hear what we're going to be doing!"

"Hold on you two!" Mr. Davis stated firmly just as the almost-twins were reaching for their Journals. "The potion is going to take a month to brew, so don't you think it would be hard on your friends if you tell them now and make them wait almost a month before they can do anything?"

The two almost-teens sighed in unison as their hands went back to the table and their smiles slipped from their faces.

"You're right," Harry admitted for them both, being the more talkative one of the pair most of the time. "I think they'll understand if we wait at least a couple of weeks before telling them so that the wait is less..."

Harry picked up his fork and began eating as he wondered what sort of animal he might be. He knew a snake was likely, but he really didn't want to be a snake, even if it was the symbol of Slytherin. Otherwise, he really didn't know what he would be, but he hoped it would be a strong animal that would be able to fight.

Looking over at Tracey, whose blond hair had slipped from behind her ears as she ate her eggs, he thought about what sort of animal

she might be. He saw her as something small to show her quietness a lot of the time, yet something fierce for when she was angry or trying to protect her friends and family.

Though he had no idea where it came from, an image of a light-brown cat with Tracey's blue eyes looking right at him appeared in his mind, sitting at her spot at the table.

He blinked and the image disappeared, but he was still staring into her blue eyes, which had a look of amusement, happiness, and excitement in them. Harry just gave her a half smile and went back to his breakfast, still thinking about the animals his friends would become.

It was when he wondered about Ginny's form a couple of minutes later that he realized something.

"The Weasleys are in Egypt and won't be coming back until the last week of summer," he said aloud as the thought suddenly came to his mind.

"That's right," Tracey mused quietly. "They won't be able to help with the potion until then."

"We'll start a batch of the potion again next week for just the three of them," Mr. Davis decided quickly. "That way the rest of you won't have to wait, but they can use their potions when they get home."

"I don't think they'll object all that much," Harry replied as he shared an amused smile with Tracey as he pictured the reactions of the three Weasleys they were friends with when they found out that Egypt had made them have to wait an extra week to find out their Animagus forms.

...

The last two weeks leading up to Harry's birthday, which was only a day before Tracey's so they were sharing a party on the 31st of July, went by smoothly. Harry and Tracey had to use all of their Occlumency training to keep the fact that they had a secret from their friends, especially the Slytherins.

Astoria and Harry were working together during training because even Daphne had given up on working with her sister; they were both just getting too good with all of the forms of combat, and their speed made it even harder for the others.

Even though most of their friends had the basics down finally, Harry and Tracey still spent some time each day using training with knives and swords to fight. Their training had included using both weapons in either hand, which would be an advantage for when using wands, so they had to keep using their left hands as they didn't want to lose the practice they had put into it.

Their hand-to-hand combat instructors, who were two older Aurors, were beginning to have them use their knives during their training as knives gave a person an advantage while fighting without magic. So, with dulled knives, Harry and his friends were taught how to take advantage of a knife when on the ground, whether on top of the opponent or not, and while on their feet.

One of things drilled into every single one of their heads, though, was that anything could be a weapon, so they should take advantage of that. The other was to not let the fact that they had the advantage get to their heads and allow them to get cocky; that one had been proven to almost every person in the group at least once, with Harry being among the few to not have to be taught it because he had learned it during his younger years with the Dursleys.

The Animagus Potion was being brewed by Mrs. Davis in a room off to the side of the library so that none of the children could find it by accident and ruin the entire thing. Harry and Tracey weren't even allowed into the room as Mrs. Davis didn't trust them in there unless she was in there to watch them.

To Harry, training, using the Journals, hanging out with friends, flying, Quidditch, and thinking about being an Animagus made the two weeks leading up to his birthday fly by, and Tracey agreed with him when he brought it up one day.

Before any of them knew it, it was July 31st.

...

Harry and Tracey went downstairs for breakfast on Harry's birthday, which just so happened to be on a Saturday, after chatting with Ginny and the Twins twins for a bit as they described one of the tombs they were in. One of the twins was making comments aloud for the group while Ginny and the other twin, usually Fred, would write random things down. Neither of them had commented on the fact that it was only the three of them using the Journals that morning as they had a pretty good guess where everyone else was.

As they had guessed, the moment they walked into the kitchen, they spotted basically all of their friends at the table and waiting for them, all of them smiling. The two shared a look and a smirk before smiling happily at their friends.

"Harry birthday, Harry!" Hermione said as she rushed over and pulled him into a tight hug tightly. Many others also called their own happy birthdays over to him as he detached himself from his bushy-haired friend.

"Thanks you guys," he replied with a smile.

"Are you all spending the night?" Tracey asked as Daphne hugged her with one arm, already guessing the answer but wanting to check.

"Of course!" Draco exclaimed, surprising Harry slightly as he hadn't been sure if the blond would be able to spend the night at Tracey's; he had only been able to a couple of times so far that summer. "Father told me I had to when I mentioned that your birthdays were one day after another," he informed the pair as if he had read Harry's mind.

"That's awesome, Draco!" Harry called over to him while Terry, Theo, and Blaise all converged on him with smiles, grabbing his arms and dragging him to the middle of the table.

"Come on, there's food and then we're going outside to play a game of Quidditch!" Blaise said excitedly as he pushed Harry into a seat at the table, earning a few eye rolls from some of the girls.

"What is it with boys and Quidditch?" Hermione asked, exasperated, while she took a seat. She had never taken to flying, let alone playing Quidditch, though she did go to all of the school games and watched.

"I have no idea," Tracey replied as she sat herself down across from Harry. She, unlike Hermione, liked flying just fine, but she preferred not to play Quidditch unless they were a player short. "Does anyone know where my parents are?" she asked suddenly as she looked around for them, realizing that their friends were taking up the entire table and her parents were nowhere in sight.

"They said something about eating at Daphne's house this morning and that they'd see all of us this afternoon," Theo said with a wave of his hand like it was nothing, which it really wasn't as it wouldn't be the first time this had happened when there were too many children over at their house.

Breakfast was a rowdy affair, though that was to be expected with so many of them all at one table.

Susan and Hannah were distracting Astoria with Padma slipping alternating between their conversation and the one between Terry and Hermione, who seemed to be talking about the summer assignments. Justin and Neville were talking plants and Herbology at the end of the table while, at the other end, Maya, Daphne, and Tracey were all talking about anything that came to mind, with Luna adding in a random comment here and there. Harry, Draco, Theo, and Blaise were all talking Quidditch, though Harry was the quietest of the four.

At one point during the meal, Harry and Tracey had a silent argument through looks, head shakes, and facial expressions that Tracey won. Harry wanted to tell all of their friends about the potion today, but Tracey thought they should wait another week so that they would only have a couple of days before her mother had to let them in to add in the three drops of their blood needed to tune the potion to them. Finally Harry had relented, though not before the two of them had drawn some attention from their more attentive and curious friends, meaning basically everyone in the room.

Outside, the boys managed to make two teams without Beaters. Harry had Daphne, Theo, and Padma for Chasers with Tracey giving in and playing Keeper, which only a few of the people there knew was her best position. Draco had claimed Blaise as his keeper while Neville, who had gotten better on a broom with

practice over the summer, and Astoria joining him as a Chaser; Susan was wrangled in to be Draco's Seeker.

Once the game had begun, it was obvious that Daphne was as good a Chaser as Theo and Draco while Astoria seemed to be pretty good at it, but she seemed to have a knack for wanting to hit the ball more than catch and throw it. Susan and Harry were just flying overhead and watching the group below while looking for the Snitch, though both were pretty sure who was going to find and catch it.

Blaise was blocking a lot of the Quaffles aimed at his goalposts, but it was obvious Draco had known of Daphne's ability and knew he would need Blaise just to keep the score as low as possible. Tracey wasn't half bad as Keeper, but she let in more goals than Blaise, which wasn't all that unexpected really.

Daphne and Theo utilized Padma to pass the ball between them to so that she could help with fakes, but the two of them did most of the shooting for Harry's team. Neville sort of did the same thing for Draco, but he also took and got a couple of shots.

By the time Harry had finally dived suddenly and caught the Snitch, the score had been 160-150 in Draco's favor, though that was only because Blaise was a better Keeper and Astoria wasn't that bad of a Chaser.

When they finally landed, the entire group was surprised to see the three Gryffindor Chasers and their Seeker there with the others that hadn't joined the game, enjoying the show above them.

"Do any of you want to play a full game of Quidditch after lunch?" Angelina asked, obviously challenging the Slytherin players to a match.

"Sure," Harry replied when everyone turned to him. "Blaise, Theo, Daphne, and Draco will play Keeper and Chasers with Astoria and..." he looked around quickly "Justin as Beaters for my side."

"I'll join your side as Keeper," Tracey offered, glancing at Angelina.

"Terry and I are willing to be Beaters," Neville told the girls softly.

"It looks like we have our teams," Katie informed the group. "This is going to be an interesting match after lunch. Now come on, you all look starving!"

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"And Daphne has the Quaffle!" Padma called out with the Sonorus Charm on her that Mr. Davis, who was sitting next to him on a lawn chair, had placed on her. It made it much easier to commentate on the match for those around the field in different areas to hear.

"She's going racing towards Tracey's goal, - she fakes and drops the Quaffle below her! Draco grabs the Quaffle and shoots it right under Tracey into the leftmost goalpost! It looks like one of Draco's plans worked yet again. The Gryffindor Chasers have their work cut out for them.

"And it's Angelina with the Quaffle. She passes it off to Katie, who throws it above her to Alicia, who races towards Blaise, only to have Astoria launch a Bludger right in front of her, stopping her short! Bad luck Alicia, but nice shot Astoria! Man, she is definitely a Beater, that girl."

Harry let out a quiet chuckle from his point beside Patricia, who had agreed to stop looking for the Snitch for a minute so that they could watch the Chasers race back and forth. He had guessed from how Astoria had played Chaser that she would make an excellent Beater, which was why he had chosen her without even thinking about it.

"You knew she'd be a good Beater, didn't you?" Patricia asked him quietly as they watched Theo snag the Quaffle from Katie and race down the field again.

"I had a good feeling about it," he admitted quietly. "Now, I think we've watched enough. Time to go Seeking again."

Patricia agreed with a nod before turning to the left side of the Pitch pitch while Harry went to the right. Both of them quickly fell back into their patterns, searching for the Snitch.

"And Angelina races towards Blaise! She throws the Quaffle and – he saves it! Nice try Angelina. Nice block there, Blaise." Padma was making sure to compliment both sides so that she was unbiased.

"Has Harry seen the Snitch?" she suddenly asked.

Harry had gotten bored and went into a vertical dive out of boredom, making it look like he had suddenly seen the Snitch. In reality, he only wanted to try the Wronski Feint to see if he could pull out of the dive in time, not to confuse Patricia. He had done it a few times in practice and when he went flying alone, but never with other players.

When it looked as if he was going to plow into the ground below, Harry pulled up on his broom with all his strength and flew parallel to the ground, the soles of his shoes skimming the grass lightly.

Looking up, Harry was surprised to see the Snitch right by Angelina's foot, which was staying in place because she was staring at him.

Without even thinking about anything else, he leaned forward on his broom and shot like an arrow towards Angelina, earning a shriek from her before she moved out of his way. Harry completely ignored her as he reached out and snagged the Snitch just as it realized the player wasn't above it anymore and it had to move slightly.

"And Harry has got the Snitch!" Padma called when she realized that he did indeed have it in his fist. "First he pulled the Wronski Feint, now he has the Snitch. I don't think it's possible not to be amazed by our friend here."

"Bloody hell, Harry, how did you do that?" Patricia exclaimed as she flew over.

"I got bored and wanted to dive," Harry admitted truthfully since it wasn't something he minded telling. "Spotting the Snitch like that was just luck."

"Blimey, Harry!" Blaise exclaimed as he too flew over with the rest of Harry's friends, all of them dismounting. "That was an amazing Feint!"

"What's so amazing about my dive?" Harry asked in confusion; he hadn't really been trying to feint, just do the dive.

"You barely pulled out of it in time," Tracey informed him quietly as she slipped between their friends to be next to him.

"I know that..." Harry said slowly.

"Have you done that before?" Draco demanded.

"I've done smaller dives in practice and a few like that when I'm flying alone, but never with other people around," Harry stated as memories of flying alone and doing sharp dives flew up in his mind.

"Bloody hell, Harry, Flint would be furious if he knew you had never shown him you could do that!" Theo told him. "You should be glad that there's got to be a new captain this year; Flint left school last year."

"We're doomed this year," Angelina told the other three girls from the Gryffindor team.

"Slytherin has a kid who can do a Wronski Feint perfectly without even realizing it!" Katie exclaimed.

"Who knows what else they've got up their sleeves..." Alicia muttered.

"I've got to say, Daphne, you're pretty darn good as a Chaser," Katie added after a few moments of thought, looking over at the dirty-blond.

"You do work well with these two boys," Alicia informed her as if the idea had just come to her.

"Daphne wants to be a Chaser on the Slytherin team, but Flint wouldn't have accepted a girl no matter what, and she's afraid the next captain will be the same," Tracey whispered into Harry's ear. "If the captain lets her on the team, those three will show the Gryffindor Chasers what they can really do. Let's just say, those three have been playing Chaser with either Blaise or me as Keeper for years now, and they can read each other well."

"Thanks," Daphne told the Gryffindor Chasers while glancing at Tracey momentarily, which Harry only caught because Tracey was

still just moving away from his ear and he had been looking at Daphne.

"Time for dinner, kids!" Mrs. Davis called from near the house, reminding the Quidditch players of the necessity of food.

"Race you!" Harry yelled as he took off for the house, his friends all cursing at him as they moved to follow. Harry just laughed as he got to the house first and went to his room to put his Nimbus away.

When he and the others spending the night got back downstairs, they found pizza and other Muggle food waiting. Tracey caught Harry's eye and they both smirked slightly, knowing that a few of the Purebloods in the room had never had any of this stuff.

It was an amusing meal for those who knew of the food in front of them because the Purebloods had the most interesting faces as they tried each thing for the first time. The meal was a huge success, and all of it was gone by the time a cake was brought out for both Tracey and Harry.

Once everyone had a couple slices of cake with them, they all headed to the living room, where Harry's gifts were waiting. Tracey had agreed that while they would share the cake, she would open her gifts the next morning after breakfast.

From the Gryffindor Quidditch players, Harry got a book on past Seeker moves, new soft leather Seeker gloves, and new leather Quidditch pads. Many of his other friends got him DADA books that they had Tracey make sure he didn't have as that was his best class. A few other books he got were in Transfiguration, Charms, and Potions as all of his friends knew that the three of those classes weren't that far behind DADA for him. The Potions book was the most interesting, in his opinion, as it was on the ingredients used in potions.

Draco had gotten Harry something no one had truly expected: A dragonhide cord that would shrink to fit any part of his body and could have a sheath attached to it. When Harry had opened it and Draco told him what it was for, Harry had immediately realized what Draco was giving him.

Pulling out the dagger on his belt, he attached it to the dragonhide cord and then slipped the cord around his left thigh, only letting it go when it was where he wanted it. The cord shrunk to fit his thigh without putting any sort of pressure on it. With a small smile on his face, Harry grabbed the dagger in his left hand and spun it around once before re-sheathing it.

All of the friends training with their daggers wanted one, and Harry thanked Draco, truly meaning it when he said that the cord was truly appreciated. Both boys shared a look, and Harry knew that Draco was doing this to make up for their first year. For Harry, the cord meant it would be easier to use his dagger during hand-to-hand training.

Once the four Gryffindor girls had been informed that most of the kids in the room had daggers and were learning to use them, Harry began opening the last few gifts.

Tracey's parents had gotten him a pair of dragonhide gloves that didn't have fingers on them. When he asked what they were for, Tracey leaned in and whispered that they would be useful for their training because they would protect his hands, make it easier for him to grab things, and he could still use his hands. Her parents informed him that there was a way to make it look and feel as if he wasn't wearing them when he still was; they were going to show it to him later.

Theo, Blaise, Astoria, and Daphne got Harry something else he had never expected: A snake. It surprised everyone in the room at first, but then Harry smiled slightly and bent down closer to the snake in the glass tank they had gotten for him.

"I'm hungry," the snake was saying quietly. "Can I have a mouse? Maybe one that I can chase around a small area outside of this glass tank."

"You're really hungry?" Harry asked the snake with a hint of laughter in his tone.

"You speak my tongue!" the snake exclaimed. "You're one of the few humans that can; I've heard of you."

"Yes, I'm a speaker," Harry replied while he truly laughed. "Do you have a name?"

"I have not been alive long enough or seen more than a few snakes to have a name," the snake informed him, obviously saddened by the fact.

"How about Ankh? It's the Egyptian symbol for life, and I think it should fit you well, since you're definitely full of life," Harry suggested.

"I like it!" Ankh told him.

"Come here," Harry told Ankh as he took the lid off the tank and put his hand inside for Ankh to wrap around.

"Thanks you guys!" he then told Daphne, Theo, Astoria, and Blaise as he turned to face them with a smile on his face.

"No problem, Harry," they all told him while laughing.

"Daphne thought that you might enjoy having a snake to talk to instead of just Ginny," Blaise added.

Harry turned to the others and saw that the four Gryffindor girls were smiling slightly. He had almost forgotten that they were the least likely to know of his ability, but it looked as if they knew about it, probably from the twins.

Lifting his hand, he quietly asked Ankh to rest around his neck but not to choke him. Harry knew he needed his hand to open the last gift, which was the one from Tracey.

Opening the package, Harry saw it was another book, but this one was definitely not a book to read. It was a photo album.

Just looking at the first few pictures told Harry that Tracey had spent hours finding the perfect pictures and figuring out how to put them into the album so that it wasn't just a couple of pictures on each page. There were pictures of Harry alone, with Tracey, with Ginny, laughing with the twins, studying with people from the first and second years, and so many more. The pictures ranged from first year, the summer after it, second year, and this summer. They even

included some of the pictures Harry had taken of the twins while pranked.

Putting the album aside, Harry got up and hugged Tracey tightly, fighting back a few tears at the thought put into her gift. It was such a Tracey thing to do, and he knew it. They both knew how much something like this would mean to Harry, which was obviously why Tracey had spent so much time on it.

Harry didn't even have the words to thank all of his friends for what they had done for him. Luckily for him, they all understood and took turns hugging him. There were no words needed when you knew each other as well as they did.

...

"Tracey?" Harry whispered into her ear as he tried not to wake up Maya, who had shared Tracey's room with her for the night as there weren't enough rooms for all of their friends.

"Yeah?" she muttered sleepily as he shook her awake.

"Can you come with me?" he asked softly, Ankh hissing from his spot on Harry's shoulder.

"Where?" Tracey asked as she woke up more and tried to rub the sleep from her eyes.

"Just out into the backyard," Harry told her as he held out her cloak.

"Sure," she agreed, and the two quietly slipped out of the house.

When they got to the pond in the back, they sat down side-by-side, looking out at the pond and the moonlight reflected on it. Harry had a hand on something in his lap that didn't look like it was there.

"Why did you ask me to come outside?" Tracey finally asked.

"I want to give you your real gift now," he told her softly. "The one you'll get in the morning is just a Charms book I picked up for you so that no one would realize I got you a different gift."

"You got me something else?" she asked, a bit surprised.

"This," he said softly, making her turn towards him to see him lift his Invisibility Cloak off his lap to reveal a sword alongside its sheathe.

Harry picked it up and handed it to her. Both of them could see the medium-sized emerald in the hilt. Harry could only watch as Tracey ran a single finger down the snake carved into the hilt, a single one on each side. The tail began at the bottom of the hilt and went up until its open mouth was right at the bottom of the emerald, the body twisted as if the snake was moving.

Tracey was going to say something when she saw the blade itself. Carved into it was a lion's head, looking as if it was roaring. At the tip was an eagle in flight, the beak right at the tip. Between them was a badger, paws out as if about to leap on an opponent. The other side of the blade had the exact same thing on it.

Thought Tracey didn't know it, the way the carvings were put onto the sword was identical to how the goblins had put the snakes onto Slytherin's Dagger, which Harry had left in his room.

"This is amazing, Harry," Tracey whispered in awe. "It must have cost so much to have made."

"Not really," he admitted quietly. "The blade and hilt are from my vault, as is the emerald. I gave both to the Goblins and paid them to put the emerald into the hilt and carve those into the blade and hilt. It was much less than you'd expect for something this beautiful."

"You can be so amazing sometimes, Harry," Tracey told him as she put the sword on the ground and hugged him tightly in thanks.

"You're basically my sister, Trace; this is nothing compared to having you here to give it to," he told her softly, truly meaning it all, even if it was something he didn't say often.

Once she let go of him, Harry and Tracey spent another half hour down by the pond before heading back to bed. Tracey had the blade in a sheath and agreed that this was something to use at a later date once she truly knew how to fight with it.

Harry spotted a figure watching them both from her parents' room, and knew that Mr. Davis had seen the whole thing. Tracey's father

was the only other person to know of the sword, so Harry knew that no one else would find out until Tracey told them, which wouldn't be for a long while.

Some overused ideas from others stories, I know. Ankh is just a normal corn snake, not a magical one. Many of the Animagus stuff is used, some of it isn't. *Shrugs slightly* Blame my annoying Plot Beta for asking me about using the Animagus thing if you wish I didn't have it as she placed the idea in my mind. (You know who you are, my friend! I still blame you for this one!) Either way, I hope you all thought Sirius's introduction to the plot wasn't too boring, even if he isn't actually in the story yet. Other than that, I don't really have much to say, which is a good thing as I'm sleepy and trying not to fall asleep long enough to get this posted.

Please leave a review? Oh, if you see messed up stuff in the chapter like something was fixed but the old stuff is still there, please note it in a review. I think I caught it all, but I'm tired and don't wanna read this for a fourth time today... :) Oh, I'm on Spring Break, officially, now, so I'm hoping that my muses will be kind and cooperate for the week so that I can get through as much of fifth year as possible, but we'll see. I've got a little of one chapter and the next and it'll be fifth year, so it depends on how much I write each day. Bye for now!

Posted: 3/13/11

Edited: 3/13/11 (Note: I got one review and decided to stay up despite exhaustion to edit this, so please continue to point out extra things as sleepy eyes miss stuff!)

Chapter Twenty-Nine

"Two things you all must know about what we are going to do here," Mr. Davis told the teens in front of him as he stood in front of the long table of cooling cauldrons.

"The first is that it is highly illegal because you are not going to register, so no one can find out that you are all doing this."

"I still don't understand why we aren't going to register," Hermione muttered darkly. She had been the hardest to convince because she didn't want to break the law, but they had eventually gotten her to agree because the idea of being an Animagus had gotten her attention.

"We aren't doing this for fun, Hermione," Harry stated, stopping Mr. Davis from continuing as he hadn't heard Hermione. "This isn't even because of Sirius Black in the long run; he was just the final push so that we would do this."

"Then why are we doing this?" Hermione demanded, spinning around to face Harry.

"So that we'll have something no one knows about when Voldemort comes back!" he told her, barely holding in his anger. Hermione had been taking out all of her annoyance and anger about the idea of doing something this illegal on him and not anyone else, and now it was finally time for his hold on his temper to crack, and everyone but Hermione seemed to have realized it.

"Ha! Give us a real reason, Harry!" she demanded, obviously not realizing that the reason he had told her was the true reason.

"That is the real reason!" he snarled out between his clenched teeth. "Voldemort is going to come back one of these days, and we need some way to be able to protect ourselves and escape! So if you want every Death Eater still out of Azkaban to know that you can turn into an animal and put up protections for it, fine, be my guest!"

Tracey had grabbed onto Harry's shoulder tightly, but Harry wasn't even fighting her yet. The hand on his shoulder did serve to remind him that there were others in the room, though, so he knew he couldn't go too far before they would interfere. It was only the fact

that everyone knew this was coming soon that stopped anyone from interfering already.

"You-Know-Who is dead!" Hermione yelled. "You killed him when you were a baby! It's what gave you that scar!"

"And left me without parents, I know, Hermione, I know!" Harry yelled back while obviously fighting tears as the memory was forced back up. "The problem is that I did not kill him! He's still alive out there somewhere and he's going to come back! If we aren't ready for him, we'll be killed instantly!"

"Harry, calm down," Tracey whispered to him, trying to calm him down.

"I will not calm down!" he yelled as tears fell from his eyes and he fought Tracey's hold on him. "My parents' bloody murderer is going to come back and Hermione is worried about breaking the bloody law! It's as if she thinks their deaths mean nothing, absolutely nothing!"

"Someone, go get Ankh," Tracey called over her shoulder as she held onto both of Harry's arms with all of her strength, trying to stop him from charging at Hermione.

"I don't think that your parents' deaths mean nothing," Hermione told Harry a lot more calmly, tears falling down her own cheeks as she realized what Harry was thinking. "They were amazing people who shouldn't have died when they did."

"Then why do you think that learning to be Animagi so that we can protect ourselves from their murderer is such a bad thing?" Harry yelled at her.

Hermione flinched, and it made Harry both guilty and proud that he could make her flinch right now. Unfortunately, the pride was stronger than the guilt because of his anger.

"So what if it's illegal?" he asked her angrily. "If we have stuff they aren't expecting up our sleeves like the hand-to-hand combat, the knives, the swords, and being Animagi, we might actually have a chance of surviving when Voldemort comes back! It's as if you want to die!"

Just then Harry felt something smooth and cool on his cheek, and he looked down to see Ankh on his shoulder.

"Calm down, Harry," Ankh told him. "Your friend is scared and upset, as are most of your other friends. You've done enough for now."

Harry looked around the room, and saw that his friends were indeed upset by what he had said. When he saw that, he stopped fighting Tracey and sank down to his knees, Tracey following him with her hands now on his back.

"I didn't mean to," Harry hissed in Parseltongue, not even realizing he was doing it. "I didn't mean to scare them. What have I done? My friends are scared, Hermione actually has tears falling down her face, and I've just done something I shouldn't have."

"Your friends all know that, Harry," Ankh told him, surprising Harry until he realized he must have been speaking in Parseltongue instead of English. "They'll forgive you. Just talk to them."

"I'm sorry," Harry said quietly before he looked up at Hermione and repeated it even louder so that she could hear him.

"I am too, Harry," she told him as she held out a hand for him to take so that she could help him stand up. "I shouldn't have been going after you about how becoming an unregistered Animagus is illegal when you're doing this so that we have extra protection for the future."

"Are we good, then?" Harry asked, looking straight into Hermione's brown eyes.

"We're definitely good," she told him with sincerity in her eyes before hugging him for a moment.

"As I was saying," Mr. Davis began once everyone was back where they had originally been. "Not only in this quite illegal, but it will also be a lot of work. Do not be surprised if some of you get it by the end of the school year while some of you get it next summer and some of you don't get it until the end of your fourth year, for most of you at least."

"This is something that can take years to learn, so you will all get it at different speeds. I personally believe that you'll all be quicker than most because you can help each other as you go along."

Harry looked around at his friends and knew from the looks on Padma, Terry, and Hermione's faces that he would have to give them his books on becoming an Animagus right before they went home. It was a lucky thing that Harry and Tracey had already read them during those three weeks they were the only ones to know about what was coming.

"Now, I will cover for all of you using this one spell, but this will be the only time. The spell is Revelaro Animalis, and you use it on the potion in the cauldron marked with your name because it will only show itself to the person who put the blood into it." Mr. Davis clapped his hands together in excitement. "Who wants to go first?"

When none of his friends stepped forward, Harry realized that they all wanted him to go first, so he sighed internally and stepped up to where he knew his potion was. Pulling out his wand from its holster, he pointed it at the potion.

"Revelaro Animalis," he said carefully.

Suddenly, animals began flowing across the surface of the silver potion. They were moving so fast that he could only glimpse flashes of color, nothing more. Then the animals began to slow down and he could see a lion with dark fur followed by a black snake and then a raven, all of them with emerald green eyes.

When the animals finally stopped running across the potion, there was a single animal staring back at him. A wolf with a lot of black in its fur looked back at him with emerald green eyes and a very small white line of fur above the right eye. Harry knew that it was a bit smaller than a fully grown wolf, but that was because it would grow with him. This was definitely his form.

Smiling slightly, Harry looked away and grabbed the vial beside his cauldron. He poured the potion into the vial carefully before sealing it and putting it down in front of his cauldron. Then, and only then, did he turn around to face his friends, who were all waiting impatiently.

"Well?" Daphne demanded, asking the question everyone was thinking.

"I'm an animal," Harry informed them happily with a straight face.

"Harry," almost everyone in the room groaned, cracking his façade and allowing him to break out in laughter.

"You should have seen your faces!" he gasped out between laughs. "Priceless and definitely worth it."

"Now that you've had your laugh, what is our leader going to be able to turn into?" Theo asked sarcastically.

"An animal that actually fits, now that I think about it," Harry said thoughtfully once he had calmed down. His friends all groaned until Tracey finally walked over to Harry to whisper into his ear, making a sound for the first time since he had done the spell.

"If you don't tell us now, Harry, I think our friends here would love to know about our first day of training, don't you?"

Harry blushed before going pale as he realized what she was talking about. He glared at Tracey lightly as she stepped back while smiling innocently.

"You are so evil, Trace," he told her before sighing and giving in. "Well, I saw a lion, then a snake, and finally a raven before it finally stopped and showed me my animal."

Harry paused there, waiting to see if anyone wanted to guess what his animal was.

"Damn!" Blaise muttered. "I could have sworn he'd be a snake."

"Hand it over, Blaise," Draco informed him, holding out his hand for the Galleon Blaise passed him.

"I was hoping for a lion, but I kind of figured it wouldn't happen," Hermione informed Harry as she watched Susan and Hannah give Neville a few Sickles each because he had told them Harry would never be a lion.

"It's a good thing I knew you all were betting on my form, eh?" Harry asked his friends with a slight smirk, surprising most of them.

"How did you –?" Justin couldn't even finish his question.

"Trade secret," Harry informed them as he tapped the side of his nose. "Anyway, my potion ending on a wolf; a dark, green-eyed, wolf."

"I knew it!" Tracey said happily, collecting her winnings from the entire group as no one had thought that Harry could be a wolf for some odd reason.

Harry had actually found out about the bet when Tracey told him that she and the entire group had made a huge betting pool with a Galleon per person where each person said a single guess on his form, and she had chosen a wolf. Just paying attention had told Harry that there were small bets going on between a few others.

Once the betting was finally done, Harry watched as his friends did the spell one-by-one, each of them bottling up the potion before turning around and telling the rest their form.

Hermione ended up as a cougar while that cat Harry had pictured a month before when first told about the potion was Tracey's form. Both Theo and Draco were foxes, though different colors, while Blaise was a bear. Much to the entire group's amusement, Daphne was a lioness, while Astoria had ended up as a golden eagle.

Terry was the dog of the group and Luna was the owl. Susan was a tiger, Hannah was a horse, and Justin was a cheetah. Neville was a falcon and Padma joined him in the air as a hawk.

Overall, they had animals for many different situations in their group, and they still had three more potions being worked on for Ginny and the twins.

...

"Now that you all know your forms, it's time for you to begin the transformation," Mr. Davis said as the group all found places to sit in

the living room. "Does anyone other than Harry and Tracey know how to transform?"

"You have to concentrate on a certain part of your body like your hand and imagine it turning into whatever part of the body it is on your animal," Hermione said, not surprising anyone that she was the only other person to know. "So I would imagine my hand being a paw in the exact same shade I had seen it on the potion, and then try to sort of push my magic into that part of my body so that it can transform."

"Very good, Hermione," Mr. Davis complimented. "Does everyone understand what you have to do to transform? Good. Then, all of you should begin with one of your hands. I'll just leave you all to it."

Tracey's father left them all alone, and most of the group immediately started trying to change their hands into hooves, paws, or wings. Those that didn't were asking Hermione or Harry to explain how to do it again, much to their amusement.

Eventually everyone was trying to change. Harry was picturing the paw he had seen on his wolf while imagining something traveling from his chest, down his arm, and to his hand. When he felt something on his left hand, he opened his eyes and blinked in shock.

"No way!" he exclaimed happily as he saw that he had a small patch of fur on the back of his hand, though it was a very small amount.

"How'd you do it?" "Nice, Harry!" "Teach us, please!" were what his friends were saying after they, too, had gotten over the shock of seeing something different on him.

After that, every single day for the two weeks before school, anyone who possibly could went over to the Davis house. Mornings were spent working on Animagus transformations and afternoons on combat training while a few asked to be taught Occlumency by Harry and Tracey.

When Ginny and the twins got back the last week of summer, all three finished their potions and found out their forms. It surprised almost everyone that the twins were two different animals, but Luna had pointed out, in one of her moments that everyone could figure

out what she was saying, that although the twins looked identical, they were not the same person in two bodies.

Fred ended up as a monkey, which fit as he was the more playful of the twins, and George was a raven. Ginny, on the other hand, went along with the others in the feline group and was a lynx.

The only day no one went to the Davis house was the day that the four of them were going to Diagon Alley to shop for supplies, and most of their friends joined them on that day so that they wouldn't miss a training session.

It was to Harry's amusement that he figured out Hagrid's birthday gift of a biting book was actually the book for Care of Magical Creatures. He had helped out the bookstore's owner by showing him that stroking the binding calmed down the books. When Tracey had asked him about it, he had only replied, "I found that out by being very bored and running my hand down the book; I'm not saying anything else."

Harry was taking Care of Magical Creatures and Ancient Runes as his new classes while Tracey was joining him, though he had had to stop her from also taking Muggle Studies by pointing out that she knew more about Muggles than most did except the Muggle-borns.

Blaise and Theo were taking Arithmancy instead of Ancient Runes while Draco followed Harry, as did Daphne. All of the third years were in Care of Magical Creatures and a good portion of them took Arithmancy or Ancient Runes, a few being brave enough to take both. Hermione was taking every single class, and not even Harry could snap her out of it and stop her from doing it.

Before anyone knew it, the summer was over and it was time go back to Hogwarts.

...

"When do you want to go see Sebae?" Harry asked Ginny in Parseltongue as they found an empty compartment on the train and claimed it as their own before heading back to say their goodbyes.

"Friday after dinner?" she replied, figuring that would be a good chance to get away from their friends.

"Meet you in the bathroom then," he told her with a quick smile before rushing off to tell the Davises goodbye.

By the time he got back to his compartment, Theo, Astoria, Daphne, Blaise, Susan, Maya, Neville, and Hermione had already claimed seats in it, though they left the ones Harry and Ginny had claimed open. When the train left, the twins, Ginny, Tracey, Hannah, Justin, Padma, and Terry had joined them. Draco came a while later.

Hannah, Susan, Justin, Maya, and Terry all left to go find other friends, but the others all stayed in the compartment.

"So, what sort of song do you think the Hat will use this year?" Hermione asked curiously about halfway through the train ride. "I mean, we never did find out what last year's song meant, did we?"

"Not that I ever noticed," Padma replied, the rest of the compartment agreeing except for Harry, though he did nod so that no one would question him.

He knew that he was the only person in the entire school who understood that song from last year, but he didn't know how to explain it to his friends, and he wasn't sure he wanted to.

"Why are you upset?" Ankh asked Harry from his place around Harry's neck.

"It's nothing, Ankh," Harry hissed back, knowing that Ginny was now looking at him after hearing the quick exchange of hisses.

"What are you talking about Ankh?" she asked the corn snake, who had gotten as fond of Ginny as he was of Harry.

"Harry stiffened when someone spoke," Ankh informed the redhead, making her look at Harry more closely.

Harry was internally cursing Ankh, knowing that just that much information would tell Ginny that something was going on, and she would be able to see it easier than anyone else except for Tracey, who was on the other side of the compartment with Astoria and Daphne.

"What do you know about the song, Harry?" Ginny demanded quietly, their conversation still going unnoticed as it wasn't easy to hear their hissing when they were purposely making it as quiet as possible.

"It's nothing, Gin; just leave it alone," he begged, really not wanting to have to tell anyone about how he was Slytherin's Chosen Heir, though he had a feeling Ginny wouldn't let him get away with that.

"No, Harry, you're telling me what you know about last year's song!" Ginny's hissing had been louder that time and everyone in the compartment heard it, drawing attention to the fact that Ginny was upset and Harry didn't want to tell her something.

"Not in here!" he told her sharply. "It involves showing you something, and I'm not doing it where the others can all see it."

"Fine, then, come on," she stated as she stood up and pulled on his arm. "We're going somewhere else so that Harry here will actually tell me something," Ginny informed the others in English, obviously in a bad mood.

Harry groaned as she dragged him from the compartment, so he willingly went along with her so that he wouldn't embarrass himself. They eventually ended up in an almost-empty compartment that only had a sleeping man in guessed the man was the new DADA teacher, which was confirmed by the Professor R. J. Lupin on his briefcase.

"Talk," Ginny ordered as she flung herself into one of the seats.

"I said no one, Gin!" Harry told her angrily, gesturing towards the new professor.

"Silencio," she muttered as she waved her wand in a square between the two of them and their professor. "Now talk!" she demanded, and Harry knew he had no choice as the professor couldn't hear them even if he woke up.

"Fine," he sighed as he sat down across from her. "You remember how I told you I was in the Chamber over Christmas Break last year? Well, I met Sebae then, but I also had a lovely visit from the Bloody Baron after something flew out of where Sebae was being kept.

"A dagger flew out of the opening when I let Sebae out, and it only stopped when it was floating in front of me. Baron told me that it was Slytherin's Dagger and I was its new master." Harry paused then as Ginny gasped and tried to take it in; he knew it would take a bit.

"So you now have Slytherin's Dagger?" she asked to make sure she had heard him properly, or that was what Harry guessed she was doing.

"Oh yeah," he told her as he unsheathed it and held it up for her to see.

Ginny looked at it in confusion, blinked a few times, and looked even closer at it. That was when Harry remembered the Baron telling him that only people he wanted to see the true Dagger could see it, meaning that Ginny was just now getting to see the true form of the Dagger. It would definitely explain her odd actions.

"But... that looked like your emerald knife!" she exclaimed.

"There's a protection on it so that it looks like some other sort of knife or dagger unless I want the person to know what it really looks like. I've still got my other dagger and I use it for most of the training sessions, but otherwise, I hold onto Slytherin's Dagger and keep it on my belt, even while I use Draco's gift to sheath my original dagger on."

"Okay," Ginny started slowly as she stared at the Dagger. "So you have Slytherin's Dagger. Is there anything else that goes along with it?"

"Well... Being the master of Slytherin's Dagger makes me his Chosen Heir," Harry admitted quietly as he sheathed the Dagger, not looking at Ginny. "That's what the Hat meant by the Chosen Heir, and the story it mentioned is the true story of Salazar Slytherin that the Baron told me."

"So you're telling me that the Sorting Hat was talking all about you last year when he sung that song?" Ginny asked, sounding a bit amused.

"Yup," Harry told her with a nod as he continued to look at the ground. He only looked up when Ginny started laughing. "What? What's so funny?"

"I'm sorry, but the entire song was written about you, Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, leader of leaders for everyone with a Journal, and no one has figured it out, not even Tracey!" Ginny broke down laughing, and Harry realized what was so funny and joined her.

"How is it that the best-known person in the entire school can do so much without anyone knowing until you want us all to?" Ginny asked as she finally got her breath back.

"What are you talking about?" Harry demanded, confused by what she was saying.

"You figured out that the so-called monster was a basilisk months before even Hermione did, and no one else figured it out until you told them! Even more, you knew where the Chamber was for months, and no one else could find it until you told them after going back into it to save me. Now no one has figured out that you're the Chosen Heir, and I'm the only one who knows it that's alive and human, and only because I made you tell me!

"How in the world do you learn and do so much without anyone knowing while being so bloody famous?" Ginny was staring at Harry in amazement even as she laughed about the idea of it all.

"I've never thought about it like that," Harry told her was indeed amazed as he realized how much he had done without anyone else knowing until he had wanted them to. "I guess it's a lot of luck, putting together small details, and just keeping it all to myself until I need to use it."

"This explains why you're in Slytherin and not in Gryffindor..." Ginny muttered quietly. "You use your head more and know how to keep things close until you need to use it to get what you need or want."

"Oh, be quiet," Harry laughed.

Suddenly, the train began to slow down and the lights soon flickered out. The compartment got colder and colder.

Harry heard Ginny stand up and felt her sit down next to him quickly, one of her arms going around him, the only thing showing him her fear.

"Finite," Harry muttered as he slipped his wand into his hand, pointing it in the direction of the Silencing Charm Ginny had used earlier. "Lumos," he then said, a light suddenly flaring from his wand as he pointed it in the direction of the door.

The door began to open and a skeletal hand covered in gray, almost dead-looking skin that was pulled tight over the bones showed plainly in the wandlight. A hooded creature followed the hand into the compartment before the hand disappeared and the hood turned in the direction of Harry and Ginny. Not even the light from his wand could show Harry what was below the hood, and Harry was relieved by it.

Suddenly, Harry began hearing voices in his head.

"Ginny... Please be okay Ginny..." It was Harry's own voice, and he knew that they were his thoughts when he had found Ginny in the Chamber.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives..." The Prophecy, which had been weighing on his mind all summer as he trained, thinking that he would need those skills to defeat Voldemort in the end, flowed through his mind in the same voice that had spoken it in the Davis's home from the smashed orb.

"A Horcrux is a terrible thing. To make one you must commit a murder, then rip a piece of your soul off of the rest of it, and put it into an object. It will anchor you to life even if you die, but you will never be the same again." The things that Harry knew he had to find and destroy, or Voldemort would never be able to die.

Then came something he hadn't expected: A woman screaming in pain. When he heard that, everything went black.

...

"Harry? Are you okay, Harry?"

Harry woke up to the sound of Ginny calling his name, and he opened his eyes to see her looking down at him as he was lying down on the ground.

"Who screamed? Are you okay?" he asked as he slowly sat up.

"No one screamed, and I'm fine, just really shaken up," Ginny told him quietly, and he saw that she was very pale.

"Are you okay, Harry?" the professor who had been in the compartment with Harry and Ginny the whole time asked; he had obviously woken up.

"Fine," he told the man as he stood up steadily, feeling fine except for the cold in his body. "What was that thing?"

"A Dementor; they guard Azkaban and were checking for Sirius Black," the man informed him. "Are you sure you're fine?"

"Yeah, I'm just a little cold," Harry told him.

"Have some chocolate, both of you," the professor – Professor Lupin, Harry guessed – said as he held out a couple large bars of chocolate. "Give some of that to your friends."

"Uh... we'll need more than this if we're supposed to give it to all of our friends," Ginny told their professor with a small giggle, imagining only two bars with all of the friends back in their compartment.

"Ah, yes, I've heard about your group of friends," Professor Lupin said with a smile as he held out another four bars of chocolate. "Make sure you all have some of that, you two having the most, and I'll go see how long until we get there. I'll come and inform you when I know."

"Thank Professor," Harry told him as he and Ginny left to head back to their friends.

"There you are!" Hermione exclaimed when they entered the compartment, both munching on some of the chocolate from Professor Lupin and feeling much warmer. "Where have you both been?"

"We were talking," Ginny told Hermione indignantly.

"Professor Lupin, the new DADA professor, told use to give some of you a piece of this chocolate," Harry added as he began breaking off pieces of chocolate and passing it around, giving all of his friends good-sized pieces before splitting the rest of a final bar with Ginny.

"Ah, good, you're all eating the chocolate," the voice of Professor Lupin said happily from the doorway.

"Of course, Professor," Harry told the man. "We always listen to the competent teachers."

The others in the compartment laughed as they realized he was talking about Professors Quirrell and Lockhart.

"That's wonderful to know," Professor Lupin replied with a smile still on his face. "Now, we're almost to the school, so any of you not changed should do so."

"Thanks, Professor," most of the compartment said, the few not saying anything being the ones with chocolate in their mouths still.

Once the professor left, the few not in uniforms quickly changed while the others turned their backs. The conversation that followed was about the new professor and how kind and knowledgeable he was, and no one commented on his old robes or how tired he looked.

Okay, be truthful; how many of you actually guessed his Animagus form? I know it took two different people whom I asked for their guesses multiple tries before they figured out it was a wolf. Also, yes, the title Becoming Alpha does have some part from the wolf form, but I also chose it because Harry is becoming a leader. FYI, Alpha will be the word connecting my different stories in my own little word, hence the "Rise of an Alpha" for the series name.

Anyway, the spell used for the Animagus Potion does not belong to me. I stole the words from the lovely Dangerverse by Whydoyouneedtoknow on (It's used in a different situation there). So credit for that goes to her.

Keep in mind what the Dementor made Harry think of because my lovely Plot Beta (Not Arnel - a real life friend) got annoying about something and wrote this as a way to placate her while also just writing it.

Okay, Monday I went and put all I have of the sequel into a Word Document and came up with 453 pages, which added up to 191k words for the 42 chapters I've written thus far. Becoming Alpha ended up almost exactly a hundred pages shorter and only 158k words. Did I mention the sequel is still unfinished? Hopefully the length will make up for my posting only once a week again pretty soon...

Posted: 3/16/11

Chapter Thirty

Harry looked down the table to where Maya and her fellow second years were sitting near where the new first years would be sitting. All of the leaders in Harry's year agreed that the second year leaders should be the ones to pick the first year leaders. Though everyone, including Maya, had agreed that it would be hard for anyone to be better than Astoria for a leader, and she was almost a given for Slytherin.

Just then the first years entered the Great Hall behind Professor McGonagall, and Harry saw Astoria among them near the front. They all walked towards the Sorting Hat, which sat up straighter on its stool, looked around the Hall, and began to sing.

"I'm the Sorting Hat,
And it's my job to say where you belong,
But do not worry
For you will not be separated for long.
Hogwarts is happy
For the students are combining;
They are working together
And most certainly uniting.
The Chosen Heir claimed his right,
Though he has told no one of it,
Which is not a problem for now
As, until the end, it can stay your secret.
The important story has been heard,
The story has been believed;
If the story could be told,
I would be very relieved.
While the story may change things,
There are still four places to go,
Four Houses that can become home,
One of which upon you I will bestow.
There is the noble Gryffindor,
Which houses those who act with their heart
To show their bravery
From which they will never part;
And then we have fair Hufflepuff;
This House is a place of loyalty,
Which isn't just a must,
But can make you look like royalty;

From there we see intelligent Ravenclaw
Where they learn much from a book
And use their minds well,
Though there is more to them than just a first look;
Finally we have sly Slytherin,
Where the cunning snakes lay,
And their ambition drives them on,
Using both to find their way.
Now I believe it is time to Sort you,
For me to look inside your heads,
As I will say where you do belong,
And you will fit in if you remember what I said."

Everyone cheered while Harry understood that the Sorting Hat was telling him to find a way to get the true story of Salazar Slytherin out around the school. He shared a look with the Bloody Baron and knew that the two of them would be having a conversation sometime soon.

Harry didn't pay much attention to the Sorting at all this year as his mind was on the song and what it meant, but Harry heard Astoria's name and was pleased to have it confirmed that she was a Slytherin.

Not even dinner truly brought Harry out of his thoughts, though he did pay enough attention to know that he wasn't eating random things. His friends weren't really talking to him, which made it easier.

"This room is quite noisy. Why aren't you talking as well?" Ankh asked Harry from around his neck but under his robes. "Oo, can I have some of that meat?"

Harry had to hold in a snort as he grabbed a few bites of meat and slipped them into his robe, making it look as if he was brushing his hair away from his face as it was almost down to his shoulders, so it looked realistic. After that, Harry joined into the conversations with his friends about their chances on the Quidditch Cup this year.

From what Harry could tell by watching the first and second years, Astoria was indeed the new Slytherin leader. Daphne's small grin whenever she looked at her younger sister confirmed her pride in her sister.

When Dumbledore stood up at the end of dinner and explained that the Dementors were guarding the school from Sirius Black, Harry was barely able to hold in his groan. He was lucky that only Ginny and Professor Lupin knew he had fainted earlier, but it also meant none of his friends realized why he hated the Dementors so much. Now he had to decide if he was going to tell them or not.

Once Dumbledore had released them, Harry got the password from a Prefect and passed it on, but he stayed in the Entrance Hall. He stayed perfectly still in the shadows and watched students, teachers, and ghosts pass by until he was alone. Still, he waited in silence.

Finally, Harry saw the Bloody Baron leave the Great Hall and look around the Entrance Hall. That was when Harry finally stepped out of the shadows in the corner of the Hall and showed himself. The Baron floated over to Harry, and boy and ghost began talking in hushed whispers, not wanting to be overheard even if it seemed as if they were alone in the Hall.

"I believe the Sorting Hat wishes Salazar's story to be told," the Baron commented dryly once he reached Harry.

"Oh, I didn't realize after hearing the song that literally said that," Harry retorted sarcastically, barely able to stop his voice from rising from its whisper.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" the Baron asked with a raised translucent eyebrow.

"No one will believe me if I just tell everyone," Harry stated matter-of-factly. "Besides, if I told people, everyone would know I'm the Chosen Heir," Harry's voice had gone almost silent as he said that before it rose again, "because last year's song said the Heir would be the one told. I don't want people to know until they have to! I'm kind of hoping that's at the end of the war and Voldemort's life, if that's what the Hat meant."

"Do you have any ideas on how to get the story out then?" the Baron asked calmly, trying to calm Harry down.

"Just one idea," Harry said with a smile that Harry could tell worried the Baron. "And it's the only idea we need as it'll get the story heard for sure." Harry just smiled at the Baron after that.

"Well? What is it?" the Baron asked impatiently.

"You tell them, of course," Harry stated, still smiling. "You're a ghost so it's quite possible you were alive then, no one will realize I'm the Chosen Heir, and the story will be heard quickly," he elaborated when he saw the Baron was frozen in shock and needed extra time and information to overcome it.

"You're asking me to tell people Salazar's story myself?" the ghost was finally able to ask in disbelief. Harry only nodded in response. "A very Slytherin idea, Mr. Potter," the Baron complimented. "I'll talk to the Headmaster before talking to the ghosts; they gossip as much as students do."

Harry laughed quietly in agreement with the ghost's statement. He was keeping quiet and looking around the Entrance Hall to make sure the two of them were still alone. Neither of them had heard anything besides themselves since they had begun talking, but a person never knew when someone could sneak up on them.

"How will the students find out, though?" Harry asked curiously. "The ghosts might tell some, but it would work best if everyone heard the story from you."

"Let us see what the Headmaster does. If he asks me to tell the staff, I will tell him I wish to inform the students of it as well," the Baron replied before looking thoughtful. "Though you do realize there will be many consequences of this, right?"

"Like what?" Harry asked, having only seen one or two at the most.

"Almost all of the Slytherins and a lot of the others in the school won't believe me, even if there is written proof somewhere that I was friends with Slytherin." Harry nodded, letting the Baron know that he knew that and to go on.

"There is also the fact that the Headmaster will ask if I have told the Chosen Heir this and who the Chosen Heir is, because he will realize quickly that this is probably the story the Sorting Hat has been referring to the past two years."

"I didn't think of that," Harry admitted softly. "What I'd suggest is to make no mention of Sebae, the Chamber, or the Chosen Heir... actually, tell them about the Chamber and Sebae, just not where they are or that Sebae is alive because they believe I killed her. Just don't mention anything about the Chosen Heir or that you know who it is. If you must, tell Dumbledore that I know the story, without mentioning it's me, of course."

"Of course," the Baron agreed. "And I believe your idea is a good one, Mr. Potter. It will help give credit to Salazar as, except for poor Myrtle, Sebae did not kill a single victim either time Tom Riddle controlled her. Very well, I believe that we've covered everything we needed to."

"Yup," Harry replied. "Thanks for all of this, Baron!"

"It is no problem at all, Harry," the Bloody Baron replied with a small smile, using Harry's given name for the first time all evening, though Harry knew it was only for the whole thing to be a bit more professional; the Baron had used his name back in the Chamber.

Harry slipped into the shadows and down into the dungeons after watching the ghost float up through the ceiling, a smile on his face as he thought about how the story would be received.

...

"Where have you been?" Tracey asked as Harry slipped into the Common Room; she was the only person still up.

"Walking around the castle," he replied as he flung himself onto a couch, knowing he wouldn't be going to bed until Tracey was pleased.

"Don't you mean talking to the Baron about how to tell the story the Sorting Hat was talking about?" she retorted as she kneeled near his face, looking him straight in the eye.

"What? How...?" Harry couldn't even form a full sentence as he gaped at his almost-twin. He had quickly sat up when she said that, and she sat next to him on the couch, facing him.

"I saw the look you two shared after the song, Harry. Besides, did you really think I wouldn't notice the changes in you after Christmas? You took people accusing you of being Slytherin's Heir to heart more after then, and you began playing with your knife more and more." Tracey's eyes moved towards the fire for a moment before looking back at him again as she continued, eyes still determined.

"When I finally saw you after the Chamber, you were more relaxed, yet you were also worried about something the whole time. It all was apparent when you told us the story about the Chamber; you were lying through your teeth the whole time. Something else happened down there, Harry." Harry was sitting there somewhat shocked as Tracey placed a hand on his knee, speaking right to him.

"On top of all of that, when we were learning moves with our knives, you held your knife one way, but you held it a different way when we sparred. It was as if you were holding two different knives when they were identical, and as if they were different sizes.

"Now, tell me what the bloody hell has been going on with you!"

Harry stared at Tracey for a few moments after her outburst. Her voice had risen a bit at the end, which wasn't all that common, though Harry had seen it more than most, and she had cursed, which she did less than Daphne, who preferred not to curse.

"Tracey..." he started as he shook his head slowly.

"You will tell me Harry," she growled quietly. "Do I have to guess?" she asked when Harry just continued to shake his head slowly, unable to believe what she was telling him. "Fine! I believe you're the Chosen Heir and you've known it since Christmas Break. On top of that, I believe you got a dagger of some kind that disguises itself as your knife, and you were using it whenever you could during training."

"Trace," Harry muttered as she finished, her face more red than usual from her anger, "I'm not even going to ask how you figured it all out because you're you," he told her, unsheathing the Dagger and holding it up for her.

"Wow," she gasped in awe, her anger forgotten for the moment at the sight of Slytherin's Dagger. "It's beautiful, Harry."

Tracey reached out to hold it, but Harry pulled it back quickly, looking at her apologetically as she looked at him with a mix of sadness and anger.

"Sorry, Trace, but I'm not sure what will happen if anyone but me touches the Dagger," he told her as he sheathed it again. "It's supposed to burn anyone who touches it, but I'm not sure what will happen if I let the person touch it, so I'm not even going to bother testing it."

"It's okay," she sighed as she leaned back again. "I understand. You're just trying to make sure no one gets hurt from touching it. Well, thanks for finally admitting it all to me."

"Like I had any choice," he told her with a snort. "First Ginny, now you; who's going to confront me and make me tell my secret next?" he mused quietly.

"Ginny?" Tracey asked in confusion.

"Remember the train ride?" Tracey nodded as her eyes widened, everything making sense. "She forced me to tell her once Ankh here made it obvious that I knew something no one else did about last year's song." Harry gestured towards the snake, whose head was poking out of his collar and looking around the Common Room with interest.

"A very nice room you have here," Ankh finally commented as he realized Harry had noticed him looking around. "Lots of snake statues, though it's a bit cold for me."

"You can stay with me, then," Harry hissed back quietly, not even looking down at his snake as he had been waiting for the comment on the temperature. "Just remember that no one except my friends from Tracey's house can see you. Got it?"

"I'll remember, Harry," Ankh replied before slithering back into Harry's robes to keep warm.

"Too cold for him?" Tracey asked in amusement.

"A bit," Harry replied with a smirk before yawning. "Well, I believe it's time to get some sleep. We don't even know what classes we have tomorrow, and it's the first day."

"Goodnight, Harry," Tracey told him as they got up and walked over to the separate hallways to the dorms.

"Night, Trace," he replied with a small smile.

...

"Whoa," Harry gasped as he walked into the Great Hall with his Slytherin friends minus Draco, the second years, and the first years. He froze just inside the doors, the others all surrounding him so that they could look as well. "This is new..."

There were no House tables in the Great Hall anymore. In their places were a bunch of tables that had two dozen place settings on them, twelve on each side of the table, staggered and spread out around the room, which seemed to be a bit larger than it had last night. It sort of reminded him of how the cafeteria in primary school had looked, with lines of tables all around the room, none touching. Of the few students already in the Hall, none of them were sitting by House completely, though most were sitting by year and one handful of Slytherins wasn't with the other Houses at all.

"What happened in here?" Daphne asked in awe as she looked around.

"Mr. Potter happened, Miss Greengrass," a voice said from their right. Everyone turned to see Professor Dumbledore looking at the group with a small smile on his face and a his blue eyes twinkling, and he looked around the Hall once more before his eyes came to a stop on Harry.

"Are you blaming this on me?" Harry asked in disbelief; he hadn't done anything to the Great Hall!

"Oh no, my dear boy, I am not blaming anything on you, but crediting this on you," the Headmaster said, looking astonished that Harry could even have asked that. "None of this," he waved his right hand around the Hall to show that he meant everything going on

including the mixing of Houses at the tables, "could have happened if it wasn't for you coming and beginning to unite the Houses."

"You did this because of Harry?" Maya asked as she and Astoria moved up to be on either side of Harry, representing the three youngest years of Slytherin House without even realizing they were doing it.

"My dear girl, without him this wouldn't have been possible," he replied. "Your professors and I all saw the difficulty you were all having with intermixing at meals because there wasn't enough space, so we spent a few weeks near the end of last term discussing possible solutions. It was, in fact, your Head of House, Professor Snape, who suggested making smaller tables and allowing you all to choose your own seats. Except for the Sorting Feast and End of Year Feast we'll leave the tables like this, though we're still deciding about the Halloween Feast."

"Professor Snape suggested this?" Daphne asked in disbelief, though Harry wasn't as surprised as most of the group. He had seen Snape being a lot kinder than most of his friends had; he could see the Potions Master suggesting something like this.

"Of course," Dumbledore replied with a smile. "Now, I believe you have a meal waiting as well as a few friends. Enjoy your breakfast and have a good first day back."

Professor Dumbledore walked up to the Head Table, leaving it obvious that Hermione, Ginny, Susan, and the rest of the second and third year leaders were all sitting at a table together.

"Why don't the first and second years all find a table together?" Harry suggested to the Slytherins, turning to face them. "Astoria and Maya will join you in a few minutes; I need to steal them for a bit."

"Laura, Isa, tell the first years about the classes and teachers," Maya requested of her friends, earning nods from the whole group before the two girls lead the new Slytherins to a table.

"This is amazing, Harry!" Hermione exclaimed as the rest of the Slytherins got to the table. "I wonder why they did this, but it's fantastic that they did it. It'll be so much easier to find a place to sit now."

"That's why they did it," Blaise informed the Gryffindor as they all sat down and began grabbing some food, though Maya and Astoria didn't.

"Dumbledore told us that the reason this all happened is because of our problems last year and the fact that Harry has been uniting the Houses," Theo added while Harry was making a few bite-sized pieces of bacon to slip to Ankh up his sleeve.

"Really?" Hermione, Terry, Padma, Ginny, Susan, and a couple of first years all asked.

"Yeah," Harry told them quietly, not really wanting to talk about it anymore.

"So, who are you three?" Tracey asked, obviously picking up on Harry's discomfort.

"Ah, this is Demelza Robins," Ginny told the group as she put an arm around the brown-haired Gryffindor's shoulders. "Half-Blood first year in Gryffindor and my choice for their leader." She gave the young girl a smile that Demelza returned hesitantly.

"Kyle Summerby," Matthew said as he put a hand on the blond Hufflepuff's shoulder. "And no, I did not just choose him because his surname is similar to mine." The whole group laughed at that, including Kyle; Matthew had to have heard that more than once since last night.

"Robert Chambers," Bradley told the group as he gestured to the young strawberry-blond Ravenclaw sitting across the table from him and next to Terry. "Basically yelled at one of his fellow first years when she began making fun of something Luna said; turned them all against being mean about her and they actually made a fifth year stop laughing at Luna." Most of the group whistled at him in appreciation, and he got some smiles and thumbs-up.

"Thanks," he said as he looked at the table, his cheeks pink.

"For those of you who don't already know, this is Astoria Greengrass," Maya told the first and second years as all the third years obviously knew her. "Pureblood, my obvious choice for

Slytherin leader, and younger sister of Daphne over there." Maya pointed to Daphne, who rolled her eyes.

"Maya, you should have said everyone's choice for Slytherin leader," she told the second year. "We've been saying it all summer that she was going to obviously be a leader for her House, and it was obvious she would be a Slytherin."

"Be nice, Daphe," Harry told his friend while winking at Astoria and Maya when Daphne turned away from them all to show her annoyance, earning some snickers.

"I believe the first and second years should go back to their friends before any of them start trying to hurt each other," Bradley suggested after a few moments. "Most of us only came over here to introduce ourselves."

"You go on, Demelza, I'm staying here with the others," Ginny told her friend with a smile, gesturing towards where the Gryffindor first and second years were eating. "Colin will help you all out."

Ginny's words set the others off, and the rest of the second years and all the first years slipped off the benches and hurried over to their friends.

"Wonder how they're going to give out timetables with us all over the place," Tracey wondered with a slight smirk on her face once everyone had started eating.

"Knowing Snape, he's going to order all of you to get up to the Head Table or refuse to give them to you," Susan told her with a smile.

"Us? I think you're using how he treats you in class, Susan," Theo told her with a snort. "Nah, he'll use a spell to send them to each one of us so that he doesn't even have to stand, but we'll all get our timetables."

"Here comes McGonagall," Hermione said as said professor walked over to their table, schedules in hand for the Gryffindors there.

"Good morning, Professor," Harry told the Transfiguration professor with a small smile.

"You as well, Mr. Potter," she replied, a smile tugging at the ends of her lips. "Granger, your timetable. You as well, Longbottom, Weasley." She left once Neville, Hermione, and Ginny all had their schedules, onto the next table.

"Bloody hell, how in the world is that going to work?" Harry suddenly exclaimed as he looked over at Hermione's schedule and saw that she had three classes right off the bat that morning, all at the same time.

"I've fixed it up with Professor McGonagall, Harry," she snapped as she shoved her timetable into her bag. No one else commented on her crazy schedule again after that.

The group ate as they chatted about their summers, seeing as not all of it was spent at the Davis home, though much of it was. There were a few topics not spoken of at all: Combat training, Animagus training, Journals, and the Chamber of Secrets. No one said a word about the last topic as everyone knew it was still a sore subject for all involved, though Ginny was the worst about it.

"I am still hungry," Ankh hissed quietly, his head sticking out of Harry's sleeve slightly so that he could get fed.

"Sorry, Ankh," Harry told his friend. "I thought you were done since you stopped licking my wrist. Hang on."

"It is okay, Harry. I'm just hungry, still, is all."

"Can someone give me a piece of bacon, please?" Harry requested of his friends as he listened to Ankh telling him it was okay.

"Why?" most of the table asked while Ginny quickly grabbed some bacon for him, having heard the hissed conversation. Harry had already finished his meal, so it was reasonable that no one would understand why.

"This is why," he replied quietly while holding up his arm a bit and pulling down the sleeve enough for Ankh to be seen by his friends before hiding his friend and accepting the bacon from Ginny, breaking it into smaller pieces so that no one else would realized what was going on.

"Oh," most replied just before Snape walked up behind Harry.

"Your timetables, Potter, Davis, Greengrass, Nott, and Zabini," he drawled from behind them, the timetables landing next to Harry as he bent down to be by Harry's ear.

"You will report to my office after breakfast during your free period," he whispered sharply before straightening up and walking away quickly.

"That was odd," Harry hissed under his breath in Parseltongue, barely noticing he was using the snake language as it had become a habit to use it when he truly wanted to be almost silent.

"Free hour after breakfast today," Daphne cheered as she saw her timetable.

"Followed by Defense with Professor Lupin," Tracey agreed with a smile.

"Lucky for you three, we both have Arithmancy after breakfast," Theo groaned, realizing why they had a class and their friends didn't.

"Don't complain too much, Theo," Blaise said as he grabbed Tracey's timetable from beside her plate after she put it down, looking it over.

"Why not?" Theo retorted. "They've got a free period when we don't!"

"Because they had a double period of Ancient Runes tomorrow afternoon and we've got a free period during it," Blaise told his friend as he lifted his gaze from the timetable and smirked.

"So... Almost all of our breaks are their Ancient Runes and vice versa," Theo said slowly as a smirk grew on his face. "I can't complain about that anymore, but remind me why we chose to have some of us in each class again. This is going to stink, only having one person to take turns writing down the notes with."

"Because, Theo, we're going to teach each other what we learned in each class every weekend so that, when OWLs come around, we can all take both exams and pass them," Daphne explained, barely

holding onto her patience as she knew that Theo was only complaining because he hated taking notes.

"Wait! That's why you all are only taking one subject each besides Care of Magical Creatures?" Hermione demanded in disbelief as she looked between all of the Slytherins.

The four Slytherins all gaped at her for a few moments before turning to look at Harry, who was visibly struggling to hold in his laughter. He had been the spokesperson for the group to try and convince Hermione not to take all of the classes available. When he had tried to tell her about their plan, she had told him that no one could convince her not to take all of the subjects available as she wanted as many OWLs as she could get, so he hadn't gotten the chance to tell her their plan.

"I told you that you should have listened to me!" he managed to gasp out while holding in his laughter, though it was obvious in his tone. "I tried to tell you about our plan, but you kept stopping me before I could start, so I just gave up. These idiots made me try for a week before they stopped making me try to stop you."

At that, Harry gave into his laughter, the look of disbelief on Hermione's face along with his friends' becoming too much for him. Ginny then snorted and began laughing, many of the others copying her, though the four Slytherins weren't among them.

"Either way, I'm not giving up any of my classes," Hermione said sharply, making a few of the others not already laughing begin to join those in laughter. "I've already committed to them, so I'm going to pull through." With that said, Hermione grabbed her timetable and her bag and left the Great Hall, obviously on her way to grabbing her books before heading to class.

"We'd better go grab our books as well," Padma finally said as she stopped laughing, and the rest of the group got up to go their own ways.

Once in the dungeons, Harry told Daphne and Tracey to enjoy the free period without him; Snape was waiting in his office for him. He didn't tell them the reason he wasn't going with them, but just headed towards the Potions Master's office in silence.

I will give away nothing. Please, though, give me your best guesses about what you believe Snape might want with Harry. ;) Also, if any of you happen to belong to SIYE but prefer like I do and voted for me in the Dumbledore's Silver Trinket voting, thanks ever so much for the Honorable Mention ranking! :) That was a very nice surprise. Oh, please be kind about the Sorting Hat's Song as, like last time, it's mine. Please, review, as I've nothing more to say.

Posted: 3/22/11 (I meant to post 3/20/11, but look below for reason!)

Edit: I'm sorry about the late update! Blame FF, not the author! I've been trying off and on since like 11PM Saturday night to post this, but the site decided being stupid is its new thing. If you ask around, you'll find I'm only one of many authors PO'ed by the inability to update. If you're an author who needs to update, PM me and I'll inform you how as I was just informed myself.

Chapter Thirty-One

"Thank you for allowing us to view that memory in our Pensieve, Professor Slughorn," Sam Davis said kindly as Horace Slughorn took the memory back and Vanished it so that no one would get a hold of it again.

"You are both sure that this will help in the future? That no one will find out about it or think badly of me?" Horace asked desperately.

"This memory is going to do a lot of good, Professor," Daniel Greengrass told his ex-Potions professor. "Without this memory..."

"Let us just say that this memory will mean that the next time the Dark Lord dies, he will stay dead," Sam said as Daniel trailed off. "He may come back before it happens, but he will never come back to life after he's killed again; we will both make sure of that."

"Thank you," Horace told them both. "That is a great relief to me. This memory is one of the greatest burdens I have, knowing who He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named once was and that I had given him that information..."

"We understand, Professor," Daniel told the man softly, laying an arm on his shoulder.

"It will be used well," Sam agreed with a nod and a small smile. They both took their leave after that, Apparating back to the Davis home before speaking again.

"Well, that confirms our idea of a seven-part soul," Daniel said as he shuddered in revulsion at the idea.

"Six Horcruxes, and only one is destroyed so far," Sam muttered. "Well, I believe we need to begin studying his family."

"Harry told us his full name was Tom Marvolo Riddle; Tom Riddle after his father and Marvolo after his grandfather. We should look for Marvolo as well as Slytherin's descendents," Daniel decided.

"At least we're doing our part so that Harry can do his," Sam whispered as both moved towards the Floo to go through the Greengrass library.

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"Enter."

"You asked to see me, Professor?" Harry said as he went into Professor Snape's office, still not sure why his professor can requested to him to go during his free period.

"I did, Mr. Potter; sit," Snape said, none of his usual sharpness in his voice as he gestured towards the chair in front of his desk.

Harry sat down, placing his school bag by the chair, and looked at his professor, who seemed to be fighting internally, as if unable to decide if this was a good idea or not. The fact that Snape was doing this told Harry that he wasn't in trouble but that Snape had something he wanted to tell or ask him, which was a lot better than being in trouble when he hadn't realized he had done something.

"You remind me of your mother, Lily Evans," Snape said suddenly, snapping Harry out of his thoughts. "Her eyes would always get a certain light in them when she was trying to figure something out, and a different light when she was working on a potion. I've seen both of them in your eyes before, the eyes you got from her."

"Professor?" Harry gasped, having never heard this much about his mother or his professor using a tone that showed a lot of caring, let alone the two of them together.

"Lily Evans was my best friend, Potter," the Potions professor told Harry, making him blink before nodding eagerly, realizing what his professor was doing. "I've known her since we were maybe nine or so. We grew up near one another, and I realized she was a witch, so I watched her and got to know her just by watching. Eventually, I got up the nerve to talk to her and tell her she was a witch, but it all went completely wrong.

"Fortunately, we talked again, and I made up for it. I taught her about this world, and she was my only friend. I had so hoped that she would be a Slytherin because I knew it was the only House for me, but she was a Gryffindor, and it changed things – greatly."

Professor Snape sighed sadly as he looked down at his desk, and Harry stared at his professor in amazement. He had never seen his professor show so much emotion, and to have his Head of House tell him about his mother when no one else had? It was nothing short of a miracle to Harry.

"I made friends with the wrong people, and it forced us apart, slowly but surely," Snape continued after recomposing himself. "My new friends were dark, they were evil, and Lily tried to tell me and get me away from them, but I didn't listen. In the end, I called her a Mudblood and our friendship was completely destroyed from then on."

Harry wasn't sure, but he thought he could see a tear in Professor Snape's gray eyes as he looked up and gray met green.

"She was the kindest, most caring person I have ever known, and I loved her, still love her." Harry gasped, but Snape continued, not looking away from Harry's eyes. "She died because of a stupid mistake on my part, the final stupid mistake in a series of stupid mistakes, and I'm not sure if I'll ever forgive myself."

"I don't think she would have blamed you," Harry told his professor truthfully, and he was only using what he had just been told as a source for what he was saying. "You say she was caring and kind; she would have forgiven you. After it happened, after you made the mistake, you realized what you had done and how bad your choices were, and you changed. That would be what she would have wanted from you."

"I probably would have hated you when you came to Hogwarts; in fact, I did the first night," Snape admitted as he finally ripped his gaze from Harry's, looking at his desk again. "You look like your father, someone who was arrogant and I hated, and your eyes remind me of Lily, what I lost."

"Yet... you proved me wrong. Very little of you reminds me of your father, and while you still remind me of your mother and what was lost, you also remind me of what she left behind. Your mother would be so proud of you, so very proud of you."

"How did I prove you wrong, Professor?" Harry choked out as he looked at his knees and fought back tears as he heard about the parents he had never known, would never know.

"First you were Sorted into my House, into Slytherin. The son of James Potter would have been a Gryffindor without a doubt in the world while the son of only Lily Evans would have been someone to be in any of the Houses and not care. And that's just it – you didn't care.

"You're a Slytherin, yet you try to unite the Houses and make friends with them all; that's something I can see Lily doing, something she tried to do but from the wrong side of the feud. If anything, you've proven that it takes a Slytherin hand reaching out to connect the Houses; it just can't be done from a Gryffindor or any of the other Houses, which was what Lily tried to do.

"I can see your father in you, but it's more of the mischievousness in you, the side of you that pranks the twins and everyone in the school. When you prank, you do it for fun without harming anything except possibly pride, and you don't brag or strut around the school as if pranking people makes you on top of everyone else."

Harry glanced up and saw that his professor's eyes were most certainly damp, but they hadn't fallen as his tears had. Wiping his cheeks off, Harry sat up straight and tried to smile at his professor.

"You've told me more than anyone else has ever told me about my parents, even if it is obvious you've never liked my father," he told the man in front of him. Snape looked visibly shocked for a moment before his mask fell into place and he gave Harry a curious look.

"I'm the first to tell you anything of your parents' past?" he asked, sounding both curious and shocked. Harry could only snort at the question.

"Sorry, professor," he said in apology as he realized how rude that must have sounded, "but the idea of Aunt Petunia telling me anything about my mother, let alone my father, is probably the craziest idea I've ever heard, and trust me, I've heard some crazy ideas."

"You went to go live with Petunia?" Snape demanded, looking a bit angry, which surprised Harry.

"Yeah, from the time my parents were murdered until the summer after first year," he replied. "My friends figured out how things were there and Tracey's family got custody of me; I'm never going back there again." Harry hesitated as an idea went through his mind, making it so that Snape's reaction made sense. "You knew Aunt Petunia in the past, didn't you?"

"I did," Snape replied with a curt nod, his eyes a bit colder. "She called your mother a freak from the day we left to go to Hogwarts at eleven until the day she died."

"So that's where that nickname came from," Harry muttered darkly, not trying to let Snape hear him, though it was obvious he did by the look on his face.

"If you wish to hear more about your mother, you may come during this free period every week and after dinner, if you wish," Snape finally told him after they were silent for a while, Harry remembering his aunt.

"I'd love that, Professor," Harry said quickly, truly looking forward to the idea and knowing that he'd be in this office at least two or three times a week until he knew all Snape had to tell about his mother.

"Of course, I think it would be better for you to hear about your father from some of his friends before I say anything." Snape smirked ever so slightly. "I believe you figured out from before that your father and I did not have a healthy relationship, and you will be hearing about the worst of him from me, and you should hear the best first. If, after you have talked to some of his friends, you wish to know my view of your father, you may ask me."

"That would be great, Professor, but I don't know of any of my father's friends, so I wouldn't know who to ask," Harry said sadly, realizing he wouldn't be able to find out about his father.

"You are in luck, then," Snape said with a raised eyebrow. "Professor Lupin was among your father's three best friends while we were all here at Hogwarts." Harry looked at him in disbelief. "Oh,

yes, your mother, father, Lupin, Sirius Black, and Peter Pettigrew were among the Gryffindors at Hogwarts in my year."

Snape must have been expecting a response to the idea, but Harry remembered that Draco had told him about Sirius Black and his father being best friends, so he didn't say anything.

"I guess that means I had better ask Professor Lupin after Defense today," Harry mused. "Then I can see if he's willing to tell me anything. Once I find out what I can, I can find out your side of the story about my father, after you've told me about my mother, of course."

"I suspect I'll be seeing you again soon, and quite often after that," Snape stated. Harry could see the ghost of a smile on his face, so he knew Snape wasn't upset.

"Of course! You'll probably be sick of me by the time the year is over."

With that, Harry stood up and grabbed his bag, slinging it over his head to rest on the opposite shoulder. He then looked back at his professor to see him watching Harry in amusement.

"Oh, I won't tell anyone about this – any of this."

Harry gave Snape a small smile and walked over to the door before he looked back. Snape was watching him with a slightly shocked expression, though he could tell that the Potions master was pleased.

"By the way, I know how you act is a cover for Death Eaters, but you don't have to be so terrible at teaching Potions; it's not like the children will complain to their parents about you teaching as long as you favor Slytherin over the other Houses."

With one last look at his now completely shocked Head of House, Harry left the office.

...

Harry hurried up to the Defense classroom, wanting to get there before the bell rang to end the first classes. He knew that Daphne

and Tracey would be waiting for him there, ready to pounce on him to find out where he had been. Draco would be there too, now that he thought about it.

When Draco had heard about what classes Harry would be choosing, he had copied Harry and then made his other so-called friends take Arithmancy instead of Ancient Runes, making it sound like the easier course and telling them that he would take the harder course.

In Harry's opinion, both classes had reasons to be harder than the other; it just depended upon how the person thought. He, Tracey, and Daphne memorized things visually better than Blaise and Theo did, which was why the boys were in Arithmancy instead of Ancient Runes; Draco would actually work in either class, so he just stuck with Harry so that it would be an even number.

Harry suspected Draco had pulled something about getting better grades with only two new classes over three to make it so that his father wouldn't be on his back. Draco had told him in secret last year that his father wanted him in only Runes and Arithmancy, but he had pulled the need to be outside more card on his father, hence being in Care of Magical Creatures instead.

So, when Harry finally got to the classroom a couple of minutes before the bell, he wasn't surprised to see Draco, Daphne, and Tracey waiting for him.

"Where have you been?" Daphne demanded as Harry walked up to the trio.

"Around," Harry told them all with a shrug, knowing it would annoy them, but he had told Snape he wouldn't tell anyone about what he had done.

"Harry," Draco and Daphne groaned together while Tracey just gave him a look that said basically the same thing.

"I was chatting with someone, and I probably will be during this free period for most of the year," he told them in a voice that obviously said that he wasn't going to say anything more.

Just then the bell rang, ending all conversation anyway as a group of sixth year Hufflepuffs left the Defense room, looking slightly surprised to see the four waiting out there before moving on.

"Ah, Harry and friends, I see," a voice from the classroom said, and they looked up to see Professor Lupin leaning on the doorway. "Come in, come in, we've got a practical lesson today."

"What sort of practical lesson, Professor?" Daphne asked hesitantly as she remembered hearing about Lockhart's lesson with the Pixies last year in the second year Gryffindor's class.

"Ah, well we've got a Boggart in the staff room that I thought my third year classes could tackle, and you're the first class I've had. I believe the Gryffindors are last next week, but I may be mistaken," he replied with a small smile on his face.

"Bloody hell, a Boggart..." Draco muttered quietly, a look of worry on his face that Harry could only somewhat understand.

"Are they those things that turn into your worst fear?" Harry asked slowly, trying to place the word as he knew he had read it in a book.

"Very good, Harry," Professor Lupin said. "Five points to Slytherin. That was actually going to be my first question once we got there, but I believe the whole group is here anyway, so if you could repeat that, we'll be ready to go."

Harry looked around to see that the rest of the Slytherins had, indeed, arrived from Arithmancy finally. Blaise and Theo grimaced at him as he met their eyes, and he had to hold in a snort, knowing that they were trying to make it seem like they had had a bad class even though their eyes said that they had enjoyed it.

"We're going to be learning how to fight a Boggart, which is a dark creature that turns into your worst fear," Harry repeated as he turned to face Lupin again.

"Now, all of you, bring your bags as we'll be leaving from the staff room, but you'll only be using your wands this class," Lupin told them as he walked to the door and gestured for them to precede him.

When they got to the staff room, it was empty, so the Slytherins lined up in a semicircle around a wardrobe Lupin had moved to stand next to. He had his wand out as he walked over to it, and it moved slightly, as if recognizing that someone was nearby.

"All of you need to think about what scares you the most, then decide how to make it funny. Laughter is how you defeat a Boggart."

Harry tried to figure out what scared him the most, but he wasn't really sure. Losing his friends was definitely on the list, as was Voldemort even though he could only picture Tom Riddle when he thought about the monster, but the idea of the Prophecy and failing frightened him as well. Even worse, the Horcruxes and having to actually find them frightened him as he didn't think he could find them all.

Then, he remembered the train the day before. The Dementor had made him think of all of those things in some way, and that scared him more than anything. Just one of them alone wasn't as frightening as all of them together, and that was what a Dementor represented to him.

Looking around the room, he saw many of his friends with frightened looks on their faces, Theo and Draco the most noticeable. He knew that the two of them probably had the worst memories, having grown up with Death Eaters for fathers, though Crabbe, Goyle, and Parkinson could all say the same thing.

Remembering he was supposed to be making a Dementor funny, he tried to figure out how to do so. The idea of it was almost impossible, but then he thought about how the cloaks almost looked like dark clouds, and an idea came to him that almost brought a smile to his face.

"Are you all ready?" Professor Lupin called after a long while of silence in the room.

Harry looked around and saw that most of his friends did not look ready, and he figured that only one or two of the group besides him had thought of a way to make their Boggart funny.

"No Professor," Theo finally whispered quietly, his face pale as he tried to hide how frightened he was of the thing that scared him the most.

"Take more time, guys; I was expecting it to be a bit harder in here," Professor Lupin told the group.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Pansy demanded shrilly.

"Only that he knows that we all have rougher pasts than most of the other Houses!" Blaise said angrily, obviously holding back his anger.

"Calm down, guys," Harry told the group, trying to stop a fight between Draco's friends and his own, knowing that Blaise would stand down, and Draco could calm Pansy.

"Fine," she huffed after glancing at Draco.

Harry gestured to his friends, though he gave Draco a look that said not to join them right now. They all grouped around him, and he could tell that most were remembering bad times.

"What scares you all the most?" he asked, knowing that all five of them together would be able to figure out how to make their memories funny.

"My father drunk and with a knife," Theo admitted softly. "There was a time I thought he was going to stab me; it was a very near miss."

"Try thinking of it as your father hitting himself with a rubber chicken," Tracey suggested with a laugh, just imagining the image in her mind. The side of Theo's mouth lifted slightly, and Harry knew that Theo had a funny way to transform his fear now.

"And you Blaise?" Harry asked as he turned to the tanned boy.

"My mother deciding she doesn't want a son anymore and poisoning something before I eat or drink it," he replied with a hard look on his face.

To the group, that fear was a very real one. His mother had married seven times, and all of them had ended up dead. The idea of her killing her own son could become very true if he wasn't careful.

"Imagine her as the twins coming to prank you?" Harry suggested with a slight smile, and Blaise looked thoughtful but shook his head.

"Make it Harry coming up to you with a vial of some sort in his hand, but it falls on him and he suddenly turns neon pink," Daphne told Blaise with a snort that made him smile a bit.

"Trace, did you figure yours out?" Harry asked as he turned to her, looking her in the eyes. Her blue eyes were shining with a bit of fear, which told him right away that she hadn't. "What's your fear?"

Tracey walked over to him and whispered in his ear, "You dying by a flash of green light." Harry blinked and looked at her in confusion; he didn't understand the green light part. "That's the Killing Curse, what killed your parents."

The moment she said that, Harry had a flash of green light go through his head, something he had seen in dreams – no, more like nightmares – for years at the Dursleys.

"Imagine it being me dancing terribly with a bunch of different colored lights flashing against me, like those Muggle clubs are supposed to have," he whispered back, moving his head away just in time to see her lips twitch. "I knew that would cheer you up," he said louder, letting the others know that he had figured her out.

"I can't figure out mine," Daphne suddenly said, her eyes looking a bit haunted. "I keep picturing Astoria looking at me in fear, as if I was about to do something terrible to her..." She trailed off slowly before her face hardened. "There was a time I scared her so badly that she looked as if she was about to die."

"Picture her looking like a clown," Blaise suggested.

"And dress her in Gryffindor robes!" Theo added with a laugh. "She would be horrified at the idea."

Daphne cracked a smile, and Harry knew he and his friends were ready, but they weren't letting him get away without telling them his fear.

"And your fear, Harry?" Tracey asked quietly with a look in her eyes that made it known that he had to tell or she would make him regret it.

"Dementors," he said softly, not looking any of them in the eyes.

"Dementors?" Draco asked with a laugh as he walked up behind Harry to join the group. "That's your worst fear, Potter?"

"If you must know, Draco, I had one of the worst possible experiences on the train!" Harry snapped back as he glared at his friend, not in the mood to think about how he was probably just putting on a show for the other four in the room.

"Calm down, Harry," Tracey whispered in his ear as a hand was put on his shoulder and Ankh suddenly made his presence known by slithering from in a pocket of his robes that Mr. Davis had made just for him up to his shoulder. "Draco was just pretending for the others in the room."

"Sorry," Harry got out between his teeth. "It was a very bad experience, as in, bad enough to make me bloody faint, okay?"

Tracey's hand on his shoulder tightened, making him look up at her just enough to see her eyes and realized that she was worried.

"It's nothing," he sighed quietly, knowing Tracey would be after him later on. "Let's just go tell the professor that we're ready."

"Are we all finished?" Professor Lupin asked as he walked over to the group before any of them could say anything more to Harry.

"We all have something figured out, Professor," Harry replied with a small smile, shrugging Tracey's hand off after tapping it with a single index finger to let her know he was okay – for now at least.

"Very good," Lupin told them all with a smile as they all walked back to the wardrobe. "Now, who wants to go first?"

Harry didn't want to go, didn't want to face a Dementor again, but he knew, he just knew, that all of the others in the room would turn to him. Looking around, he saw that Draco's friends had all backed

away at the idea, and his friends were all looking at him, the leader. When he saw that, all he could do was sigh and step forward.

"I guess it's going to be Harry," Lupin said, his tired face almost hiding the fact that he was frowning slightly. "Come on, Harry, let's try this Boggart. Now, you're going to say Riddikulus as you think about what you want your Boggart to look like; just be sure to make it funny so that we laugh."

Harry nodded and Lupin opened the wardrobe. A Dementor exited it, floating above the ground and making the air cold.

"Ginny... Please be okay Ginny... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... A Horcrux is a terrible thing. To make one you must commit a murder, then rip a piece of your soul off of the rest of it, and put it into an object. It will anchor you to life even if you die, but you will never be the same again."

It all flashed through his head again, but just as his vision began going black, Harry yelled out, "RIDDIKULUS!"

Before his eyes, the Dementor turned into a cloud of black in the shape of a face with eyebrows that kept moving up and down like the twins did when they tried to make someone laugh.

Behind him, he heard Tracey giggle, Blaise snort, Theo chuckle, and even Draco was making choking noises. To his left, Draco's friends were randomly snorting. Harry let out a quiet snicker, sharing a small smile with his fellow Slytherins.

"Tracey, move forward!" Lupin called, and Harry moved back, watching as Tracey moved forward.

He himself took the place of the cloud in front of them, and a flash of light had him falling onto the ground. Tracey called out "Riddikulus!" and it changed to him spinning and jumping around, basically looking ridiculous as lights in green, red, blue, white, orange, purple, and pink all appeared on him quickly before disappearing.

Even Harry had to laugh as he saw it before Blaise moved forward at Lupin's call and his mother appeared holding a small vial with

powder in it. When he used the Charm, Harry again appeared, this time dripping a bit of a potion from a vial in his hands and turning neon pink, which brought about great laughter from the whole group as they all knew that he had the reputation of changing the twins different colors.

Theo and Daphne both went quickly, followed by Draco, whose Boggart was his father pointing his wand at him and opening his mouth to say a curse before he was able to turn it into Incarcerous so that ropes flew out of it and trapped his own father in them before he fell over and got covered in dirt.

Crabbe and Goyle were both afraid of their fathers just glaring at them, and they both made them trip and fall as if that would be funny, but Harry and his friends all laughed just because it showed how stupid the pair was.

Millicent was afraid of giants, which she quickly made into just a skeleton of bones that turned to ash instantly. The ash then got blown up by a wind and turned into a face, which didn't really cause much laughter as it was such an obvious copy of Harry's solution.

Pansy seemed to be very afraid when she walked up to the Boggart, but it only turned into Draco walking away from her. It was probably the oddest fear of the group, but she was able to turn it into Draco trying to flirt, which got so much laughter that Lupin sent the Boggart back into the wardrobe just to save it for other classes.

"Five points to each of you for facing the Boggart," Professor Lupin told the group just before the bell rang and most of the class left the room, leaving Harry trying to make Tracey leave so that he could talk to Lupin alone, but she wouldn't, so Harry gave in and just asked her to be quiet.

"Professor?" Harry asked hesitantly as he walked up to Professor Lupin, truly worried that the man would make him leave or refuse to tell him about his father or something else along those lines. Just one look at Tracey told Harry that she was worried by his tone, but he didn't say anything.

"Yes, Harry?" Professor Lupin replied as he looked up from his briefcase, which he had brought along to the staff room.

"Someone... told me that you were friends with my father when you were in school," Harry began slowly, and he had to force himself to keep going when he saw the pain in the man's eyes, "and I was wondering if you would be willing to tell me about him sometime."

Harry heard Tracey gasp lightly behind him and walk up to be beside him, but he didn't move his eyes from Professor Lupin's light hazel eyes. The look in his eyes showed a lot of pain and sadness, yet a new light appeared in them as Harry requested to hear about his father before dimming again.

"I'd love to tell you about your father, Harry, but..." Lupin trailed off slowly, unable to finish his statement.

"It's okay, Professor; I just thought I'd ask," Harry said dejectedly as he turned toward the door.

"Professor, is this about Sirius Black being Harry's father's best friend and being one of your closest friends?" Tracey asked suddenly, making Harry spin around to gape between the pair while Professor Lupin had obviously frozen. "Because if it is, Harry and I already know about that, and you should just tell him about his father with Sirius Black as his best friend."

"Trace," Harry began slowly, realizing that if she kept on going like this she might as well tell Professor Lupin not to even bother telling him anything.

"Harry, you should learn about your parents, and if he doesn't want to tell you just because of one escaped murderer then it's pathetic," she snapped before he could even continue. "I'm sorry, Professor, but that's not really a good reason for not telling Harry about his father when you're the first friend of either of his parents he's ever found."

"You don't know anything about them?" Lupin asked softly, looking towards Harry, though not in the eye.

"I've heard a little about my mother, but nothing about my father except Professor Snape calling him arrogant," Harry admitted softly as well.

"If you'd like to meet most Wednesday mornings, I know you have a break that time, so I could tell you about them both," the Defense teacher offered quietly after a bit of thought.

"Thank you, Professor," Harry said. "Learning about my father from one of his best friends will be nice."

"What about your mother, Harry?" Tracey asked curiously.

"I think Professor Lupin understands. Please don't tell anyone, especially not that person. I promised not to tell, Professor," Harry almost begged.

"Don't worry, Harry, the secret is safe with me," Professor Lupin told him with a smile. "Now, you both need lunch before you next lessons, so hurry along."

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"What was that about in there?" Tracey asked as the pair hurried down to lunch.

"I found someone who knew my mother even better than Professor Lupin did, okay?" Harry snapped, though there wasn't much anger behind it. "Please, Trace, don't push; I promised not to tell anyone."

"Okay, Harry, but you're telling me about the Dementors."

"Trace," he groaned, but he knew she wouldn't let it go so he relented. "They came into the compartment where Gin and I were talking, and I fainted from all of the memories, okay? What your father had me get this summer, what he and Daphne's father figured out, the Chamber, and a scream from a woman I don't even know flashed through my mind, and I fainted.

"Please, don't bring it up!"

"Fine, Harry, but please be careful this year," Tracey requested as she put an arm around his waist to stop him so that she could hug him tightly.

"I'll do my best, Trace, I'll do my best."

Even though it took me until yesterday to post 30, you're still getting 31 today. ;-) The guesses were very fun to read, but my idea was a bit out of the blue for the conversation with Snape, so I just enjoyed seeing the different possibilities because everything said was possible if I had written it differently. Please, review and let me know your thoughts on this - and the last chapter if you didn't get a chance to read/review it yet. :)

Posted: 3/23/11

Disclaimer: Anything familiar to JKR's books probably comes from there and is hers not mine. Also, Harry Potter, Hogwarts, the Wizarding World, and anything else that has to do with it belongs to the lovely JK Rowling, not me. I'm just playing in her sandbox and building my own Hogwarts in it.

Chapter Thirty-Two

The next few weeks went by very smoothly at Hogwarts for Harry and his friends. After three and a half weeks, every single House had three years with Journals; the Slytherins and Gryffindors had taken longest to adjust to the idea of going around the many-generations-old feud while Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff only took a couple of weeks to make the adjustment.

Harry spent Tuesday and Friday nights as well as Thursday mornings with Professor Snape learning about his mother while Professor Lupin told him about his father on Wednesday mornings. Tracey had told Ginny about Harry finding out about his parents from two different people, and the pair used Ginny's Bat Bogey Hex as a threat towards anyone who tried to figure out what he was doing to be missing so often for so long. The threat became very real when Ginny pulled her wand on the twins one day.

Bole, one of the Slytherin Beaters, was made captain of the team, and he allowed Daphne onto the team to be the third Chaser after asking Harry and the other three third years if they had any other friends who were good Chasers; he wanted one of their friends so badly that he had accepted a female on the team. The trio was fantastic, and Harry knew the Cup would be theirs again that year, no problem between just the five of them.

Professor Lupin was a huge hit, especially after Neville's Boggart had turned into Snape wearing Neville's grandmother's clothes; even the Slytherins had had to laugh at that behind Snape's back.

Hagrid wasn't a bad teacher, though his creatures had calmed down after Harry had been hurt by Buckbeak the Hippogriff after Draco had insulted the Hippogriff to play up the idea that he was still a junior Death Eater. Harry didn't exaggerate the injury and told Draco he could, under no circumstances, have his father try to hurt Buckbeak as it was his fault Harry had gotten hurt, not the Hippogriff's.

Ron was probably the largest surprise of the year as he hadn't said a single thing about Harry all school year, or summer, as the twins and Ginny had later confirmed when asked. It seemed that saving Ron's sister from the Chamber of Secrets really did earn Harry some points in his book, for, while Ron still wasn't approaching the group, he didn't allow his friends to make fun of any person with a Journal, not that he knew about them.

Since the first weekend of school, Saturday had been used for homework and Quidditch while Sunday became the day for training with swords, knives, and hand-to-hand in an abandoned classroom. After that, Harry and his friends used the Come and Go Room or the Room of Requirement, which a house-elf had told them about when Harry and Draco were talking about it in the kitchens with Ginny.

The Room of Requirement was useful as it showed videos sort of like movies on the wall of the room that showed them how to do different fighting moves; it was as if the Room wanted them to learn to fight.

Animagus training was also done in the Room, once they had found it. It had been a promise to Tracey's father to do it in pairs in case someone got stuck and needed help getting unstuck, so they were keeping it. By the time Halloween rolled around, Harry and Hermione were the furthest along in transforming, though Tracey, Ginny, Padma, Luna, and Draco weren't all that far behind them. Luna was the biggest surprise to most of the group as she kept up with the rest without seeming to have much trouble, but as Harry and Ginny pointed out, her way of looking at things might have just made it so that she thought of her transformation differently than the rest, and it was working.

Harry was proud to be able to show off both arms and hands completely transformed into wolf legs and paws, fur and all. Ginny and Tracey were always hitting him when he tried to show off, so he learned his lesson after a couple of times, but that didn't wipe away the smug look in his eyes every time the group got together to practice.

Twice a month, Harry and Ginny went to the Chamber to visit Sebae on Fridays after dinner. She was very glad to see both of them, and

neither of them was seen until after midnight those Fridays because they got lost in conversation.

Ankh especially liked Sebae. The basilisk may have been larger than the corn snake, but the two didn't act like it. They would talk back and forth as if they had known one another for years, sometimes driving Harry and Ginny to hysterics.

One thing Harry had noticed about going to the Chamber was that Ginny's nightmares started to calm down, though she still had them most nights. Her nightmares mainly featured Tom Riddle instead of the Chamber, which was a large improvement. Talking to Harry also seemed to be helping the young redhead because they were spending time learning about each other. She knew more about Harry than anyone else, including Tracey, because the two of them just understood one another and could talk.

As for the Bloody Baron and how he was going to tell the entire school the story... It was a very interesting day. He had chosen the first Sunday back at school to go to the front of the Great Hall and tell the entire story to a silent Hall. His audience had been enraptured, and there had been not a single interruption. Once it was over, the other ghosts followed the Baron out of the Hall and it was silent for five minutes straight, reminding Harry of when he had been Sorted into Slytherin.

Only a quick glance at Harry, who had nodded slightly, told Tracey and Ginny that it was all true and that Harry had been told the story before. They had both believed the story from then on without a single doubt in their minds.

Unfortunately, the rest of the school was split into about three groups, and not evenly. Draco's friends, though Draco wasn't one of them, and all of the sixth and seventh year Slytherins claimed that what the Baron said about Salazar Slytherin was complete rubbish. The fourth and fifth years were split with most of the fourth and about half of the fifth years believing it after thinking about it, the rest of the fourth years skeptical but not completely convinced – Harry thought of it as the seeds being laid for later on. Most of the other fifth years were also skeptical like the fourth years, but the rest said no outright. Harry's friends and the younger students of Slytherin all believed the story after thinking about it.

All of the first, second, and third years from the other Houses—except for Ron's group—believed the Baron's story, as did all of the others with Journals. Most of the fourth years in Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff believed it while the rest were skeptical. It was about half and half for the fifth years in those two Houses, though none outright said it was false. The sixth and seventh years were all skeptical, but again, none said it was false.

Gryffindors in fourth year and above were all skeptical, with those in fourth and fifth leaning more towards believing it because of the Quidditch team's belief while sixth and seventh years were leaning more towards disbelief but said nothing for fear of the twins' wrath. Ron was one of the most curious as he hadn't showed an inclination for either side, and most of his friends were asking the younger Gryffindors as well as Neville and Hermione about their opinions on it, deciding that the reasoning was sound and going along with belief. It seemed to Harry that Ron agreed with his friends, but he wasn't saying anything; this along with the fact that his friends didn't seem to dislike Harry and his friends at all surprised many people.

Overall, it told Harry that the people with Journals believed the story because he was proving it true that all Slytherins weren't bad. It was giving them a second opinion on these sorts of things, and it was very useful in Harry's opinion. He had expected the Slytherins' reactions from the moment he had heard the story, and the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs were holding their reputation. The Gryffindors had surprised him until Hermione had told him in secret that the twins had pranked Percy when he denied it being possible, so they were all afraid of them. Otherwise, he knew that he had chosen well for friends.

As for classes, Harry and the third years were getting piled on with homework, but they all worked together and got it done. Defense had quickly become Harry's best subject with Professor Lupin teaching the lessons, but Potions, Charms, and Transfiguration were all close behind. Ancient Runes was different from the other classes Harry was taking; he enjoyed the challenge of learning new symbols and what they meant. It was something that he enjoyed figuring out, especially because Hermione could never figure out how he remembered so many runes while only looking at all of the assigned runes for half an hour while she took an hour longer. To him it was just a simple thing to learn patterns and finding ways to connect it to the meanings, but some, like Hermione, had to work a lot harder at it.

Blaise and Theo were truly enjoying Arithmancy, and their idea of having the two boys teach the others was going very well. It took a while, but all six Slytherins were keeping up with the class even though only two were in it.

Potions had Harry wishing he could burst out laughing whenever he thought about it. After his suggestion to Snape that day at the beginning of term, Snape had gradually changed the class in such a way that it didn't become obvious to other students. Finally one day he quickly put an ingredient in Neville's potion to stop the imminent disaster of an explosion, actually fixing the potion to a degree in the process. Before then, it had only been obvious to Harry because he had been watching for it, and Tracey and Gin as they had forced out the reason he was so smug in Potions from him.

Snape had been taking fewer and fewer points from Gryffindor during class while still rewarding the Slytherins their normal amount. He had also gradually stopped insulting the Gryffindors, up to the point that, before what had become known as the Fixed-Potion-Mishap, most Gryffindors got only three insults or so a lesson, though Neville had to get five as he had had a lot of insults before then.

Once the Fixed-Potion-Mishap was known around school, Snape had stopped all gradual changes and went straight to helping Slytherins by pointing out mistakes before they happened, not insulting students anymore, taking points only if they were earned, and quietly helping the other Houses with their potions. The only thing that stayed the same was that he gave Slytherin students more points than they truly earned to help his own House. Not even people throwing ingredients into other people's potions was allowed anymore, though Snape only told the older Slytherins off for doing it and didn't give them detention.

When Harry had asked Professor Lupin how the other teachers were taking the sudden change in what people said about Potions class, he was told that they were surprised that Snape had changed so suddenly, but they were relieved that it was happening. That just made Harry glad he had told Snape what he had, but he didn't tell anyone what he had done unless they guessed; only Ginny and Tracey were able to force anything out of him.

The first Hogsmeade weekend had been a blast for Harry and his friends. With the Davises as his guardians, he had gotten his permission slip signed and got to go with his friends. Honeydukes had been an amazing place to go, and Harry had gotten Ginny some chocolate from there to make up for the fact that she was too young to go still.

At the Three Broomsticks, Harry had gotten a Butterbeer. To him, it tasted sort of sweet with an even sweeter cream on top that made small bubbles Harry enjoyed just as much as the actual drink. If he had asked a Muggleborn, they might have said it was like a cream soda, but he had never had one, so it didn't really help him.

Zonko's had been fun, and he had gotten some pranking supplies while there, as had Draco. In fact, Harry got extras for Ginny as he knew she would love to be able to prank her brothers.

That Harry was getting stuff for Ginny had caused much teasing from Theo, Blaise, and Draco, but Tracey and Daphne had made them shut up while Harry had held in a blush. Harry and Ginny were close friends, but they weren't exactly siblings. It was confusing for Harry whenever he thought of Ginny as his best friend, yet she was closer to him than that. He wasn't exactly sure what to think of Ginny as anymore.

His year had been so busy for the first two months that Harry had almost forgotten about Sirius Black and the fact that Draco believed he was out to kill him for some odd reason. He heard talk about him, read articles in the paper about Black, and talked to Professor Lupin about the man, but it just slipped Harry's mind that Sirius Black was most likely headed to Hogwarts. It wasn't until Halloween that he got reminded...

...

"I'm just saying, Trace, we need to use the Room a bit more this weekend," Harry told her as they walked down to the Slytherin Common Room after the Halloween Feast. "How else are we supposed to help our friends?"

"Harry, we all know that it's you and Ginny who are teaching us along with Astoria," Daphne informed him from behind the pair,

making Harry turn around so that he could walk backwards for a few moments and see the serious look on her face.

"The three of you are the best of the group, and you all know the most," Theo said in agreement just before Harry turned around again.

"One of the only reasons I was also a person they all turned to this summer is because you and I got more training than all of them, so I knew more," Tracey said quietly.

"As much as it would pain my father to hear me say this, they're right; you and Ginny know more than anyone else in the group with only Astoria coming anywhere close to the two of you," Draco agreed as he looked over his shoulder at Harry, a smirk on his face.

"If Draco is agreeing with all of you, I guess I have to believe it," Harry mused lightly, tapping his chin with a single finger and pretending to look at the ceiling as he contemplated the idea.

"Shut up," the blond groaned as the others laughed quietly at Harry's antics.

"In all seriousness, though, Harry, Draco is right," Blaise said once they had all calmed down. "Basilisk," he added as they got to the Common Room entrance, opening it.

"I know... I know..." Harry sighed as he sat down heavily on a couch, putting his hands under his glasses to cover his eyes. He was tired and didn't really want to argue anymore.

"You okay?" Tracey asked quietly, too low for the others to hear, as she sat down next to him and put a hand on his arm.

"Just tired," he muttered back, leaning his head against the back of the couch with his eyes closed, hands falling back to his sides.

"Ouch!" Theo suddenly said sharply just as he sat down. "Bloody hell, who is it this time?" he snapped as he pulled out his Journal from his pocket.

"Ginny," Harry whispered, recognizing the level of heat as he pulled his own Journal from his pocket and activated it. He saw she wanted him to call in everyone, so he quickly did it.

Ginny: Guys, the Heads of House are coming to get everyone and taking us all to the Great Hall. Grab anything you might want; we're going to be sleeping there. We'll explain it after.

Once Ginny had sent her message to the entire group that included all of the three youngest years, she got off and left everyone either writing back and forth back or signing off to rush to dorms to change.

"We'd better change and put our cloaks over our night clothes before Snape gets here," Harry said quickly, knowing that they'd all have a while to discuss everything in the Great Hall.

They all hurried into their dorms along with the first and second years, all of them changing into pajamas before slipping cloaks on to cover them. Harry saw Theo, Blaise, and Draco all taking advantage of the cords Draco had given all of them right before school started, Harry getting a spare, to sheath knives to thighs or arms before using a spell Draco had taught them to make them unnoticeable to anyone who wasn't keyed into the cord.

Harry was keeping his actual dagger on his thigh while the Dagger was on his left arm, only Ginny and Tracey were keyed into it as no one else had figured it out.

Just as they and the first and second years got into the Common Room again and were about to begin talking about what might have happened, Snape urgently burst into the Common Room with a scowl he normally saved for the Gryffindors on his face.

"Potter, Davis, go get anyone who might be in their dormitories, NOW!" he ordered sharply, and Harry and Tracey rushed into their respective hallways for the dorms.

Once Harry had gone into all of the dorms and collected everyone in them, he rushed back into the Common Room at almost the exact same moment as Tracey, followed by a couple of seventh years.

"All of you, follow me now," Snape ordered, not saying another word as he turned on his heel and walked back out of the Common Room.

Snape led them straight into the Great Hall, exactly as Ginny had told everyone he would. This had Harry wondering what might have happened to the Gryffindors that would have involved the entire school. Moments after he wondered it, he knew: Sirius Black.

Dumbledore explained that the teachers needed to search the school and left every single student with a sleeping bag and Percy Weasley in charge as Head Boy. Once the headmaster had left the Hall, Harry grabbed a sleeping bag and then looked around to find a large enough area for the entire Journal group. Ginny Weasley caught his attention; she was standing in the middle of the room, waving in Harry's direction and gesturing him over even as Hermione and Demelza, the other Gryffindor leaders, gestured for Terry and Susan to bring their Houses over to the middle.

It seemed to Harry as he got there that the Gryffindors had saved the entire middle of the Hall for the group, making a square around the area until they could all reorganize. Just the look on Ginny's face told Harry that it had been her idea, so he smiled at her and got a small smile in return.

"Great idea, Gin," he whispered in his ear as he got over to where she was waiting in the middle of the area, the other leaders and those with colored Journals joining them before the rest of the group became a perimeter for the group.

"What happened?" Blaise asked before Ginny could reply, and she turned to face him.

"Sirius Black attacked the entrance to the Gryffindor Common Room with a knife, trying to get into our Common Room," Hermione stated, drawing gasps from almost the entire group of non-Gryffindors, though Harry was not among them.

"Is the Fat Lady okay?" he asked, drawing sharp looks from most of the Gryffindors as he shouldn't know about their entrance. "What? I've walked with friends to the Gryffindor Common Room. Doesn't mean I've ever heard the password or been inside, but I know where it is."

"She's fine," Ginny told him. "Just freaked out, really. Her portrait will need to be fixed, but other than that..." She trailed off.

"Why would Black go to the Gryffindor Common Room?" Tracey asked quietly, drawing attention as Harry usually spoke for both of them, though she did speak her own mind at times.

"Because he thought I'd be like my parents?" Harry suggested with a snort. "Seriously, Trace, Black probably just doesn't realize I'm a Slytherin instead of a precious Gryffindor like most were hoping until I got Sorted. He's been in Azkaban for years and wasn't free when the papers were printing stories about me being the new 'Dark Lord' so he couldn't have known." Everyone could hear the sarcasm in Harry's voice as he said Dark Lord, but they all understood his tone.

"Why do you think Black is after you?" Ron Weasley asked as he walked over to the group, obviously having been eavesdropping.

"Because that's what the Minister of Magic believes?" Harry suggested as he looked Ron up and down curiously, trying to figure out what the point of this was. It was a well-known fact within the Journal group that Sirius Black was said to be after Harry, but not many outside of the group knew, so Ron's question was reasonable, but Ron rarely ever spoke anything but insults to Harry, so this was confusing.

"Right," Ron said with a nod before walking back towards where the Gryffindor third years had settled, not all that far from Harry and his large group of friends.

"That was odd," Fred said as he watched his younger brother walk away.

"Quite odd," George added with a nod.

"He's been acting odd since the Chamber incident," Ginny reminded everyone, surprising a few people as most didn't think Ginny would be willing to talk about that. "I think this was a sort of test to see if Harry really is as arrogant as Ron thinks he is. Harry passed, I'm pretty sure, because it's obvious Harry doesn't like the idea and he didn't think of it because he thinks everything is about him; it's not even his idea."

"Interesting idea..." Harry muttered just before Percy told everyone that it was lights out, not that anyone was going to listen.

...

"Harry?" Ginny whispered quietly from her spot next to him hours later.

"Yeah?" he replied, still wide awake, along with most of the Hall, though it was mostly full of quiet whispers that fell silent whenever a Prefect or the Head Boy and Girl were near, only to start up again once they were gone.

"Is Sirius Black really after you?"

Harry turned over from one side to the other so that he could see Ginny. Her face was looking at his and it was full of worry for him. It was obvious that, as much as Harry had come to care for Ginny, she had come to care about Harry. He could only smile slightly before replying.

"I'm not so sure anymore," he admitted. "I mean, yeah, it's possible that he got it wrong, but Black doesn't seem like the stupid type to me, not really. I have a feeling he's found a way to watch me when I'm out on the grounds, and you know how often that is, even at this time of year."

Ginny nodded slightly as Harry was outside at least five times a week, most of them for Quidditch and the rest for breaks.

"He probably knows I'm a Slytherin, which means he's probably after something else, something not me."

"Does that mean he might not have betrayed your parents, then?"

"Right now, I'm not sure of anything anymore, Gin, but it's becoming a possibility that he was framed."

Harry hadn't admitted that fact to anyone that evening, but he truly had begun believing that Sirius Black might not have done anything he was accused of. It was a slim possibility, but it was there, and he wasn't going to let the chance go.

"I know this is going to sound weird," Ginny admitted softly after they were silent for a bit, "but I hope that he is innocent."

"Why?" Harry asked when he realized she wanted him to.

"Because it means you'll have someone else in your life, someone to take care of you. I know you have Tracey and her family, Harry, but you need someone else, someone who's there for you and only you. Basically, you need your godfather, Harry."

Neither one said another word after that, but Harry knew that Ginny was right. He really did need someone who was there for just him. The Davises were kind and wonderful, but having his godfather... it would mean the world to him.

Sighing deeply, Harry turned over and fell asleep hoping beyond hope that Sirius Black really was innocent, just so that he could have someone else in his life.

Sighs in relief Almost had that problem again from a few chapters ago with like three different documents in one. Anyway, got around it, and now I'm going to lightly apologize for not posting earlier in the day like I normally do. I've been down in Miami for most of the weekend without a laptop. If you're curious, maybe I'll explain more in a reply. :-P Still, I'm posting now, so I hope you enjoyed it! :)

Whistles lightly Well, I'm saying nothing on the topic of Sirius. I've said all I'm willing to. What I WILL talk about is something that's been brought up too many times in reviews for me to ignore it anymore. In chapter 11, I wrote a letter from James Potter to Harry. This is an exact quote of it from the version online.

We're about to cast a spell to hide ourselves, but Padfoot, your godfather Sirius Black, is trying to convince us to use Wormtail, Peter Pettigrew is his real name, instead of him to hide the secret. He's always saying, "Prongs, Wormtail won't be expected, I will; he's the perfect choice!" The thing is, I'd rather have my best friend guard my family. The problem? Padfoot has a point. I can't decide which of them to use yet.

Look at it closely and you will see that nowhere does it say that they chose Wormtail! James Potter is still deciding, so this ONLY states that's it's a POSSIBILITY!

Just had to point that out because I've been asked and I know most of you wish Harry would be bringing it up. Because it said nothing about the actual choice, it hasn't come up in Harry's mind that it might lead to proof of Sirius being framed. All I'm saying.

Posted: 3/27/11 (Day I returned from my Retreat... D:)

Chapter Thirty-Three

Harry stood with Draco, Theo, Blaise, and Daphne as they all waited for the first Quidditch match of the season, Slytherin versus Gryffindor, to begin, and all five of them were dreading it.

Unfortunately for the fourteen players, it was pouring outside and there was thunder and lightning. It was going to be a miserable match, and seeing would be next to impossible. Harry had asked Hermione for a spell to put on his glasses so that he could see through the rain, and she told him to use Impervius, so he had. Hopefully, it would make seeing with glasses easier.

Luckily for Slytherin, Theo, Draco, and Daphne had realized that rainy games were a possibility and had gone out with Blaise on a few rainy evenings to practice. Blaise had gone along because he knew he would have to learn to block shots when it was pouring. All of that along with the three Chasers' ability to think of and do plays quite suddenly would make it a bit easier on Slytherin.

The bad news was that the wind was terrible and Harry was small, meaning the wind would be able to push him around easier. He would have to be very careful during the match.

Finally, with these thoughts forcefully pushed from his mind, Harry and the others flew out onto the pitch and got into the air. From then on out, Harry felt isolated, barely able to hear the commentary even, because of the rain.

Harry kept his eyes wide open for the Snitch, and he could see Patricia was doing the same thing. At one point during the game, they shared frustrated looks as they both wanted it over and done with, no matter who caught the Snitch. It was a terrible match with the weather as it was.

Growling in frustration, Harry looked up into the air at the same time a flash of lightning illuminated the Golden Snitch maybe twenty meters up, which was reasonable as he wasn't that high this game because of the wind.

He aimed his broom at the Snitch and chased after it, the wind buffeting him from both sides as he sped as fast as he could. Just as

he grabbed the Snitch in his hand, Patricia on the other side of the pitch, Harry felt the air go cold, as if he had been plunged into ice.

The cold came at him from all sides, making it harder to breathe, and that was when Harry saw the Dementors – at least a hundred of them. Black cloaks floating around them, a few hands poking out of the sleeves, they were floating in the air, making their way around the Pitch, both by the stands and the players. There was no sound at all, not even the wind was roaring anymore.

That was when the voices and memories started again.

"Ginny... Please be okay, Ginny... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... A Horcrux is a terrible thing. To make one you must commit a murder, then rip a piece of your soul off of the rest of it, and put it into an object. It will anchor you to life even if you die, but you will never be the same again."

Then, came the screaming. Only this time, the woman, for it was definitely a woman, had words to her screams, and there was a second voice.

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!"

"Stand aside, you silly girl... stand aside, now..."

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead — Not Harry! Please... have mercy... have mercy..."

He didn't know what was going on... And then a shrill voice was laughing, the woman was screaming, and Harry knew no more.

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"Harry?" a soft voice asked, one he was sure he recognized, but he couldn't think of who it belonged to right now. His head felt heavy and hurt, his eyes had lead on them, and he didn't want to be woken up right now.

"Harry, please, you need to get up," the voice said again, and this time Harry could hear the fear in it, so he started fighting the lead on his eyelids.

He forced his eyes open slowly, blinking a few times before he felt his glasses being put on his face.

"Harry," the person sighed in relief, and now he realized that the person was Ginny.

"Ginny," he muttered quietly, still barely awake.

"I'm here, Harry, and so is Tracey," she told him, and Harry turned his head to his left to see his almost-twin holding his hand.

"Hey, Trace," he said hoarsely, and Ginny quickly gave him a glass of water which he drank gratefully.

"What happened?" he asked, once he had finished the glass and Ginny had taken it back. His voice was much clearer now.

"You fell," Tracey told him, a look on her face that Harry recognized after a few moments as fear.

"I... fell?" he asked in disbelief, sitting up until the two girls pushed him down again.

"The Dementors," Ginny whispered. "You fainted again and fell off your broom because of it. It was fifty feet in the air, Harry!" At the end Ginny was showing more fear than Harry had ever seen on her face since the Chamber, which proved how frightened she truly had been.

A quick glance at Tracey showed that his friend was upset by it, too, but she wasn't as bad as Ginny was. Tracey noticed his glance and nodded slightly, telling him to help Ginny now, her later.

"Ginny," he hissed. "Ginny, look at me please." Ginny looked up at him, and he could see tears forming, though they weren't falling. "I'm fine, Gin; I'm just fine. I didn't die, the Dementors didn't get to me, and I'm going to be just fine."

"Harry, if Dumbledore hadn't slowed you down and made the Dementors go away, you might not be alive right now!" she hissed back in a Parselmouth's version of yelling. "You almost died!"

"Maybe I did, but I didn't, Gin! I'm still alive."

Harry grabbed Ginny's hand tightly. She put her other hand around his and held on tightly. It was proof that he was alive.

"Gin, I'm fine, I didn't die," he whispered, knowing Tracey was listening. "What might have happened didn't, so concentrate on that instead of what could have happened."

Ginny took a deep breath and then smiled sheepishly at him. "Sorry, it's just... we're so close now and seeing you almost die... to see you just lying there..."

"Scary as hell, right?" Harry asked, remembering the scene he had found when he had gotten to the Chamber at the end of his second year. "Yeah, I understand, Gin. It's scary to see one of your friends almost dead."

"You should have seen the reaction," Tracey said quietly as Ginny's face showed that she suddenly realized how Harry understood what she was going through. "Every single person with a Journal was into the field in seconds, rain completely forgotten as we all tried to see how you were. All of us were so worried, Harry."

"Yet you two are the only ones here?" he asked with a raised eyebrow, thinking that this wasn't normal behavior for the Journal group.

"Madam Pomfrey kicked everyone but the two of us out," Ginny said in a small voice, obviously still thinking about the Chamber and what Harry must have found there.

"We were the quietest of the entire group, so she realized we'd be able to let you get rest while everyone else would probably find a way to wake you up with all the noise they were making," Tracey added with a small smirk that Harry returned, finding it amusing.

"Well, then, I believe we have some friends to reassure," he said, starting to reach to where his pocket that held his Journal normally

was before he realized that he had no pockets. "Where's my Journal?" he asked sharply once he had realized that.

"Right here," Ginny said as she held it out for him, and he breathed out a sigh in relief at the fact that nothing had happened to it.

He pushed himself up, and Ginny and Tracey helped him lean against pillows hastily placed behind him before allowing him to open his Journal and entering group mode, inviting everyone in as he knew they would all be going crazy. Without even looking up he knew Tracey and Ginny were sharing exasperated looks before activating their own Journals and joining the large group.

Harry: Look, I'm not going to listen to anyone. I'm only getting on long enough to let everyone know that I'm awake and okay. I hurt a little, but it's nothing compared to the aches and pains you feel after a Quidditch practice with Bludgers. I'll see all of you soon, as in whenever Madam Pomfrey lets me go. In fact... here she comes.

Harry signed off quickly and put his Journal on the bedside table. He, Ginny and Tracy spent the next twenty minutes listening to Madam Pomfrey mutter about Dementors and how they were affecting the students all while he was poked and prodded until the nurse said that all he needed was a good night's sleep. He smiled when he heard that, especially because she tasked Tracey with making sure he got to straight to bed in his own bed instead of one in the Hospital Wing.

He quickly pulled on a set of robes that Tracey had brought for him, grabbed his Journal, and all three of them left the Hospital Wing.

...

"Oh, yeah, where's my broom?" Harry asked as they walked down to the Great Hall. When there was no reply, he looked at the two girls on either side of him to see that they were looking anywhere but at him, so he put a hand on one shoulder each, making them look into his hard stare.

"Oh, Harry, it flew into the Whomping Willow," Tracey said very fast.

He froze and they stopped along with him. In his mind he thought about how the Nimbus 2001 had been from Draco. What was he going to think about Harry losing the broom?

"Draco's just relieved that you're alive, Harry," Ginny said quietly, correctly reading his face, and it looked as if Tracey had as well. "We all know you still have the Nimbus 2000, so he's truly just relieved you weren't hurt any worse," she repeated.

"Okay," Harry sighed before heading to the Great Hall, the two girls hurrying to keep up.

...

Samuel Davis was reaching into the hole in the floor of the Gaunt house when Daniel Greengrass grabbed his arm.

"Wait!" Daniel exclaimed, glowing gold eyes staring into the hole. "There's a curse on the ring that I didn't see before. It's a tricky one that's hiding on the ring itself, and it's very deadly. Let me get it off first."

Samuel nodded and backed away to watch as his friend started performing counter-curses on the ring hidden in the floor. The only thought going through his mind was that they had found their first Horcrux, which meant that Voldemort was another soul piece closer to dying, and nothing but good could come of that.

...

Hedwig landed in front of Harry at the table he was sitting at one Wednesday morning a couple of weeks after the Quidditch match, a box tied to her leg. Frowning slightly, he took it off, offered her some bacon, and then opened the short note.

Harry,

This is one of the cursed objects we discussed over the summer. Please send it back in this box as it keeps all magic inside of it, hiding any and all magic as well as stopping it from hurting anyone. Use dragonhide gloves to handle it, just to be safe.

Samuel

Harry's eyes widened as he read the note and he grabbed the box quickly, stuffing it into his pocket along with the note without opening it. He felt eyes on him and looked up to see his friends all looking at him curiously, but he just shook his head once and went back to eating, though at a much faster pace now.

"Don't follow me," he said in a voice that sounded quite different from his own as he quickly picked up his dragonhide bag, slung it over his shoulder, and rushed out of the Great Hall.

The moment he reached the Room of Requirement, he locked the door and turned around to see a room empty of everything but a rock in the middle of the room. He walked over to it quickly and knelt next to it.

Opening his bag, he pulled out his dragonhide gloves before removing the box and opening it slowly. Inside was a gold ring set with a large black stone, which had something carved on it. A closer look showed it to be a circle with a triangle inside of it, and a line from the top of the triangle to the middle of the bottom of it.

Unsheathing the Dagger from his left arm, Harry held it in his right hand, right over where the straight line was on the stone of the ring. Before the ring could even think about trying to save itself or do anything like the diary had done, he stabbed straight down.

The stone cracked under the Dagger and a scream echoed around the room before all was silent and Harry sheathed the Dagger again.

The Basilisk venom had destroyed the Horcrux, and it was just a ring now.

He put the ring back in the box, pulled out quill, ink, and parchment, and wrote a note after putting his gloves away.

Samuel,

It's done.

Harry

...

"What was that all about?" Tracey asked Harry as he slipped into his seat for Transfiguration after talking with Professor Snape about his mother.

"Your father and Daphne's sent me a package," was all he said in reply, and he knew she understood.

One Horcrux down, four more to go.

...

"Enter."

"Professor, can I ask a question?" Harry asked as he entered Professor Snape's office one Friday evening.

"If you must," his professor sighed, but Harry had gotten to know Snape a bit better and knew that it was an act.

"Sir, are there rules for people from other Houses going into another Common Room?"

"If the House does not mind the other students in the Common Room, it is allowed," Snape said slowly. "Also, they cannot learn the password."

"So I could go into the Ravenclaw Common Room if no one minded?" Harry asked for confirmation.

"Yes," Snape said.

"Thanks Professor!" Harry said as he left the office, a smile on his face.

...

Around the school, four other students were in different places. Hermione was talking to Professor McGonagall, Susan with Professor Sprout, and Terry and Padma with Professor Flitwick.

Just twenty minutes later, about five minutes after all five students had met another eight in the Entrance Hall, Ginny, Maya, Matthew, and Bradley were all meeting with their Heads of House.

Again, another twenty minutes later, Astoria, Kyle, Demelza, and Robert were in the exact same offices.

All thirteen of them had asked the same question, and all thirteen had received the exact same answer: Yes, a student could go into another Common Room if the House did not object and the password was kept secret.

All thirteen students were smiling as they got onto their Journals and told their success to the others in their years.

Homework had gotten harder to do in the library as there just weren't enough seats for them all to be in there at once. Using the Common Rooms would make it much easier, and they wouldn't have to plan homework around one another.

...

"Yes, Hermione Granger, Ginny Weasley, and Demelza Robins were all asking about going into other Common Rooms," Professor McGonagall confirmed, the last of the four Heads of House to confirm that the same occurrence had happened to her as they met in Professor Dumbledore's office.

"Interesting," Dumbledore mused. "It seems that Mr. Potter truly has begun to unite the Houses, and more than we had realized. I believe we shall see a lot of unity by the time he has finished his time here at Hogwarts."

"We're going to let this happen?" Snape demanded. Only Dumbledore could see it, but he was quite proud of Harry and did not mind in the least that there would be mixing in Common Rooms. No, he was doing two things: Showing his worry about the Slytherin Common Room and keeping up appearances for his colleagues.

"Really, Severus, I thought you'd see this as a good thing!" McGonagall exclaimed.

"Now, now, Minerva, calm down," Dumbledore said, saving Snape from having to reply and himself from yet another argument. "Yes, we shall let this happen, but I believe Mr. Potter and his friends will be using the other three Common Rooms, Severus, not yours."

"Very well," Snape said with a sharp nod.

"And the path Mr. Potter is on continues," the Sorting Hat suddenly said. "Unity is on its way, and the upcoming war will be very different because of it. He is truly on his way to greatness."

The Sorting Hat fell back asleep, and the professors could say nothing in response.

...

Christmas Break had approached quickly. Ancient Runes was still going well for Harry and his friends who were taking it, and Blaise and Theo were still teaching them all Arithmancy with Hermione's help. Defense was still Harry's favorite class, and he was doing well in Transfiguration, Charms, and Potions.

Ever since asking their Heads, all of the first, second, and third years had been taking turns doing homework in the different Common Rooms, though the first years were told to make sure they had a few older students with them until after Easter so that they could at least do some magic to protect themselves. It made it much easier as the library could be used to find books without it being so crowded, which had become a problem.

Harry and the other five Slytherins had all agreed to do something similar to what they had done the year before with Ginny and took turns using the Marauder's Map to keep an eye out for Sirius Black, but he was never on it.

The one thing that interested Harry and Draco, who had been the one to come to Harry to see if he had seen it as well, which he had, was the fact that Peter Pettigrew was always seen with Ron Weasley or in the third year boy's dormitory. Neither said anything, but they always checked for Pettigrew whenever they got the Map for their turn.

This year, Tracey had talked to the others and they all convinced their parents that they wanted to try spending a Christmas at Hogwarts. Most had promised to go home at Easter, but some just told their parents that they had to see Hogwarts at Christmas. Of course, a quick look at their faces had told Harry that many of his friends had also told their parents that he would be staying at Hogwarts and they wanted to be there for him so that he didn't have such a lonely Christmas.

He was grateful for it, not that he told his friends; most just knew already.

In fact, the plan was to finally introduce the Slytherin Common Room to those staying at Hogwarts as all of the Slytherins fourth year and up were going home, leaving the younger students with control of their part of the school. Draco was the only one among his Slytherin friends who was being forced to go home, seeing as he had stayed at Hogwarts the year before.

All in all, it looked to be an excellent Christmas, Harry decided as he watched those not staying head off towards the Hogwarts Express.

Blame exhaustion because I've had a hard time sleeping lately so my mother doesn't want me sleeping in the afternoons for my only just realizing now that it's Wednesday. I'm falling asleep even as I type this. :/ Anyway, I don't have much to say except thanks for all the amazing reviews I've been getting lately, and I'm sending out a thanks to my Beta Arnel, even if she isn't on this site. Please keep those fantastic reviews coming. :)

Posted: 3/30/11

Chapter Thirty-Four

Harry stood on four paws, his arms completely covered in fur as he moved his backside around to wave his tail, which he had finally gotten down for the first time.

Looking around the Room of Requirement, which was a large room perfect for training that allowed no one to know what they were doing as they had asked the room for it, Harry watched his friends.

Hermione was about as far in her transformation as he was only a few feet away. Tracey was going between throwing a bunch of daggers the Room had made for her at a target and checking on the two of them as she was the one there to be sure they didn't get stuck.

On the other side of the room, Ginny and Astoria were teaching some of the others more hand-to-hand combat. Neville and Blaise were doing well on the ground, grappling. Theo and Daphne were practicing their sparring. Terry and Padma were watching as the room taught them new moves with their daggers, and Susan, Hannah, and Justin were learning new sword techniques. They were probably planning on sparring sometime soon.

The twins were in another corner, working on a potion of some sort. Harry wasn't going to ask as it probably had to do with a prank or some sort of product they were working on for a joke shop they were planning on owning when they finished Hogwarts. They hadn't done much product making, but they were always testing pranks on others to see the reactions, and Harry had given them the idea of potions for tests.

Shaking his head, Harry concentrated and turned human again, sitting down heavily. He was exhausted after getting his tail to finally grow. It took a lot of energy to transform into an Animagus, and they had all learned it the hard way.

Harry knew that they were all progressing much faster than most did, but he also thought he knew the reasons. First, they had a lot of smart people to look up things. Second, they had a lot of people doing it all at once so they could take turns explaining what they felt and what might be going wrong. Third, they had a reason to learn it, and it meant a lot of determination.

Sighing, Harry stood up slowly and went over to Tracey, letting her know that it was her turn to try and transform again.

Overall, all of Harry's friends were coming along well with their training, and Harry was very glad for it.

...

Harry woke up Christmas morning to the sound of Theo ripping open presents, and he had to turn into his pillow to hold in his groan. Knowing by how tired he felt, it was probably around six in the morning.

Turning to look at his clock, Harry squinted and saw that he was off by an hour as it was seven in the morning, which was almost as bad.

Muttering darkly under his breath, Harry grabbed his glasses off the bedside table, opened his hangings, and looked around the room. He saw Blaise was looking annoyed, but turning to his presents.

"You're a right git, Theo, you know that?" Harry called down to his friend, and Blaise nodded his agreement. Theo just shrugged as he opened another gift, this one from Harry.

"Whoa, Harry!" he gasped as he stared into the box. "This must have cost so much!"

"What?" Blaise asked, looking up at his stunned friend while Harry began opening the gifts he could tell were books.

"Look at this thing!" Theo exclaimed as he lifted a sword that was almost identical to the one Harry had given Tracey for her birthday; even the animals looked similar.

After he saw that, Blaise quickly found Harry's gift to him and stared at his sword, which was almost identical to the ones Harry had given Theo and Tracey.

"Bloody hell, Harry!" Blaise yelled. "These are goblin-made with real emeralds in them, and only goblins can put things into blades like that! The swords literally cost a fortune."

"Not exactly," Harry said with a shrug. "The blades and emeralds come from my vault, so I only paid to have the emerald put into the handle and the carvings put into the blade and on the hilt."

"Still, Harry..." Blaise murmured as he stared at his blade.

"We're learning to use swords, so we should all have our own blades, right?" Harry asked, knowing that the ones his friends were using were about as bad as his own was. Only Gryffindor's sword felt right in his hand.

"True..." they both muttered before giving in and thanking him profusely.

Harry turned back to his gifts and was surprised when he opened the gift from Tracey's parents. They had gotten him four knives, each one sheathed. It wasn't until he read the note that he understood – they were throwing knives that would all return after either twenty seconds once they impacted into something or when he ran out of knives.

Draco had gotten him, and everyone else it seemed, a black dragonhide bracelet that shrunk to fit their wrists perfectly so that they wouldn't slide around. Harry's had a wolf burnt into it with silver and gray inlaid into the hide so that it looked like a silver and gray wolf on one side while he had an emerald snake on the other. It seemed Draco had gotten each person one with their House animal on one side and their Animagus form on the other, including one for himself.

Tracey, much to Harry's amusement, had given him a book on Salazar Slytherin, which was newly printed and included both the old story and the Bloody Baron's version of the story. She had added in her own handwritten portion to the end about what he had said about the Chosen Heir and Salazar Slytherin's Dagger, though he made sure she had charmed it so no one else could read it before showing the others.

Ginny had gotten him something he could wear on his shoulder so that Ankh could rest in it without it showing, which made both Harry and Ankh happy. It was charmed so that only those who knew about it could see it, of course, so it wasn't noticeable, and the inside was larger than it appeared.

Otherwise, Harry had just gotten candy and books, which pleased him nonetheless.

...

"Harry!" Hermione exclaimed as she entered the Slytherin Common Room. The entrance had been left open for the day so anyone could enter. She enlarged her new sword as she walked further into the room. "This must have cost a fortune!"

"He keeps claiming they didn't cost that much," Astoria informed the Gryffindor as she looked at the sword, which was slightly different from her own. Hermione's had a ruby in the hilt, a lion carved into the grip, and a snake with an open mouth at the bottom of the blade. It seemed each House had their own color for the gem and their animal for the hilt.

"Most of the stuff came from his vault," Tracey informed her. "I actually went with him when he got them commissioned near the end of the summer. It's true that they didn't cost him that much. Most of the money for these things usually comes from the actual gem and jewelry, not in the carving."

"That solves that problem," Padma said as she entered the room and sat down on one of the black couches, all of them used to the Common Room after a week of being in there.

"Anyone hungry?" the twins asked as they appeared in the doorway.

"Let's go eat," Harry said as he stood up, having finally learned to ignore everyone as they exclaimed over his gift.

...

"HARRY!" the twins yelled as they saw one another.

"Again?" Daphne asked in amusement as she looked the twins over.

"Like I told them last Christmas: It keeps them modest," Harry replied as everyone laughed and he snapped a few pictures before hiding the camera again.

Having gotten a bit tired of the snake theme, Harry had turned Fred's hair into a silver badger while George's was an emerald eagle. Everyone but the twins was highly amused.

"How long this time?" Fred sighed.

"No idea," Harry told them happily, earning more laughter.

"How does he do it?" George stage whispered to Fred after they had both groaned.

"I have no idea, my dear brother, but he has to have some sort of trick," Fred replied.

"Of course I do," Harry told them, but when they asked for more details, he just shook his head and went back to eating, earning even more laughter from their amused friends.

...

"Hey, Gin!" Harry called from one side of the group to the other as they walked out of the Great Hall after lunch.

"Yeah?" she asked as she moved closer to him in the group.

"We still have unfinished business from exactly a year ago, remember?" Harry smiled slightly as he watched realization flash across her face as she remembered the unfinished snowball fight between the two the Christmas of his second year. What he didn't see were the looks of horror on his friends' faces as they remembered the snowball fight, or at least the story of it.

"Fifteen minutes?" Ginny asked with a challenge in her eyes.

"Yup," Harry replied.

"Uh... Guys?" The two turned to face Hermione, the one who had hesitantly spoken up.

"Do you mind if the rest of us stay inside today? It's a bit too cold for us." The others were all nodding.

Harry and Ginny looked at each other before facing the group again and shrugging in sync. The others all breathed a sigh of relief while the two going outside went in opposite directions so that they could put on some extra layers to wear outside. The rest of the group followed a bit more slowly to their Common Rooms, the Slytherins and Gryffindors passing the two on their way back to the Entrance Hall.

Once they were both outside, they went to the middle of an area covered in snow without any trees nearby. A silent agreement between them said that they had five minutes to make a stash of ammunition before the fight started. They both began making snowballs in an earnest, both hoping to make as many as possible before the fighting began.

Just before the unspoken time was up, Harry took out his wand and used some spells he had asked Professor Flitwick about. The Charms professor, guessing they were for a snowball fight, had taught Harry a spell that made it so that the snow couldn't be changed if it was touching the caster in any way, clothing included, meaning it couldn't melt, as well as a spell that shrunk snowballs when he put them into a pocket, only going back to normal again when they were out of the pocket.

Stuffing the snowballs into his pockets, Harry grabbed two and stood up, ready to fire. The moment Ginny stood up and they caught each other's eye, they were both in constant motion, throwing, dodging, and making snowballs. When Harry ran out of pre-made ones, he began casting the spells on huge patches of snow as he picked it up so he could make snowballs without having to duck down.

It gave him a slightly unfair advantage over Ginny to have the snow right there, but neither of them minded because in their snowball fights, anything went.

By the time they began to tire, both of them were laughing and neither cared who won anymore. In fact, they were both just running around throwing snow back and forth without any real passion behind it anymore. They were just doing it because it was fun.

Harry watched, laughing, as Ginny crept closer to him, unable to see the rock he had just stepped on top of and passed over. Just as he was about to warn her, she tripped over the rock and went flying

through the air right into him, knocking both of them onto the ground with Ginny on top as they both continued to laugh. Their laughter died down quickly as they realized what position they were in.

They stared at each other for a moment before Ginny got off of Harry and sat on the ground next to him as he sat up and faced her, though neither was able to look the other in the eyes.

"Harry... I –" Harry interrupted Ginny.

"It's okay, Gin. I know you didn't do it on purpose. You fell."

"Yeah, but..." Ginny couldn't finish the sentence.

"What is it?" Harry asked softly, trying to get her to finish. She just sighed.

"Harry, I really like you," she admitted slowly, looking up to look into his eyes as she did. "And it's not my crush from before anymore. I really, truly like you." Harry could tell she wasn't lying, and it took him a minute to reply.

"Gin... I'm not sure what'll happen in the future, but I definitely feel something for you that I don't feel for anyone else." Ginny smiled happily at this, but it faded as she looked at Harry's depressed face. "The problem is that we're too young for this."

"I know," Ginny sighed sadly. "I really wish we weren't."

Ginny was silent for a few minutes as she stared at the ground. So many thoughts were flashing through her head that she couldn't think straight, but the main thought going through her mind was that Harry actually liked her, even if he couldn't explain the feelings because of his stupid Muggle family.

Finally, Ginny began thinking about what he had said. She did agree with their ages being a problem. She could also tell by looking at him that he really didn't understand what he was feeling, and if she was willing to admit it to herself, she didn't really know either. Sighing slightly, she came to her decision.

"Though I really wish this wasn't true, I guess I have to agree that we shouldn't even try right now," she whispered sadly, not looking up at him, but at the ground again.

"Gin," Harry said, trying to get her attention. "Ginny, please look at me." That got her to look up. "Gin, I think it would work out, but not now, not yet. Give it a year and we'll see where we're at, okay?" Harry smiled hesitantly at her, worried about her reaction.

"Okay," she agreed softly with a very soft smile crossing her face.

Harry stood up slowly, reaching down to offer his hand to help Ginny stand up so that they could head back up to the castle. She took the proffered hand, but didn't let it go as they headed up to the castle. Both of them knew that they'd have to pretend what had happened outside had never happened except when alone or with only the other, so they wanted it to last for a little bit longer.

When they reached the empty Entrance Hall, they turned to each other, still holding hands, and stood there for a few minutes, not a word spoken between them. Finally, both closed their eyes, let go of the other's hand, and turned away to go in opposite directions to their own dorms.

...

Harry walked into the Slytherin Common Room, barely even glanced at his friends, and walked right into the boys' dormitory. Theo and Blaise shared a look before closing their journals and following him, the girls telling the others the reason for their sudden disappearance.

When they entered the dorm, it was to find Harry laying on his bed staring at the canopy of his bed.

"Did you lose, then?" Theo asked Harry, startling him.

"Huh? Oh, no, I didn't," Harry replied once he realized what his friend was talking about.

"Then why are you upset?" Blaise asked. "You won, right?"

"Nope," was Harry's reply.

"Then how did you not lose?" Theo asked.

"Neither of us won." Harry looked up to see horrified looks on their faces and had to stifle a snort. "We gave up on the competition and began having fun instead." He watched as the horrified looks transformed into expressions of relief and had to repress a snicker that time.

"So is that why you're upset?" Blaise asked quietly.

Harry shrugged in reply, knowing that he'd probably never tell his friends what had occurred outside. They probably wouldn't even know if he and Ginny did try it, but that didn't matter. He knew that he'd just remain silent.

"So... Nothing's wrong?" Blaise asked again with a reply of a head shake. "Come on, then, Theo. Harry doesn't need us, so let's leave him in peace."

The two boys left the room, and Harry sighed in relief when they did. He just laid there looking up at the ceiling for a bit before grabbing his journal from his desk and looking at it, unwilling to decide if he wanted to deal with the others right then or not.

Groaning, he opened the book and put his right finger on the paper, thinking that the only person he really wanted to talk to was Ginny, not the others. Much to his surprise, the middle page was split in half, the left side showing the conversation going on between his friends and the right blank. Otherwise, it was completely normal except for the fact that no one had said anything to him yet.

Looking at the people using the journal, he saw Hermione, Ginny, the twins, Susan, Draco, and his four friends outside in the Common Room. Draco was on from home, probably bored.

Harry picked up his pencil, poked the blank side of the paper to see if it did anything, saw it made no change, and decided to write.

Harry: Hi?

Much to Harry's surprise, it was Ginny who replied.

Ginny: Harry?

Harry: Yeah.

Ginny: How did you get a conversation only with me when you're not even on the signed-in list?

Harry: I'm not sure. I was just thinking about how you were the only one I wanted to talk to as I activated it and this page was open.

Ginny: Well, we'll have to try to figure this out later, but right now, I'm in the conversation of the others. Maybe you could watch it and then we could figure out how to make it so it looks like I'm not using the journal after?

Harry: Sure, but try putting your finger to the page with the list and imagine talking only with me. That might be what you need to do.

Ginny: I'll do it later. I'll talk to you again later, Harry.

Harry: Okay. Just make my journal heat up when you're ready. I think I may try and sleep a little.

Ginny: Got it.

With that, Harry's conversation died and Ginny's conversation picked up in the normal group.

Harry was still shocked by what had happened, so he just put his journal in his pocket and lay back down on his bed, staring at the ceiling as he thought about how little they knew of the journals. They kept finding new features left and right. It was a bit disconcerting to realize that Tracey's father could have put anything into the journals, yet they didn't know all of it.

Sighing, Harry closed his eyes and promised himself that he and Ginny would try to figure all of the private talking out.

...

Ginny: So let's figured out what we've learned in the past twenty minutes.

Harry: If you concentrate on a certain person while either signing on or while you just have your finger on the page, then it opens a conversation with them, but you can still see the main one.

Ginny: If you put your finger on the page, or sign in doing it, and think about not being seen, it happens as long as you have one of these private conversations open.

Harry: You can have more than one open at once and you can switch between them by touching the name of the person with either a finger or pencil.

Ginny: You can switch between private and general conversation by touching the one you want with your pencil or quill.

Harry: I have to say that this is really awesome.

Ginny: And I have to agree. What's even better is that we're the first to have found this.

Harry: It really is the best being first. So, are we going to tell or keep it to ourselves until forced to show it?

Ginny: Let's keep it to ourselves. Hopefully we can keep this a secret for a year so we have a private way to talk with very little chance of the others seeing.

Harry: I agree with that statement.

Ginny: So we're agreed to keep this to ourselves until at least Christmas next year unless they find out before?

Harry: Yup.

Ginny: Then I think we're done. Night, Harry.

Harry: Night, Gin.

...

Out in the old, almost broken building in Hogsmeade, a large, black dog that reminded people of a Grim was curled into a ball on a dust-covered bed. Next to him was a long package wrapped in brown

paper and a bow, obviously an unsent Christmas gift. The dog looked at it with what could be described as a sad expression, turned to look in the direction of Hogwarts, and then looked back at the gift, putting its head onto its paws, shaking it slightly.

...

A few hundred miles away, a blond thirteen-year-old was kneeling by a door that led into his home's living room, his face a mask of shock as he listened to the conversation going on inside by pressing his ear to the door. Inside the room, two blond adults, one male and the other female, were talking as Sirius Black, the escaped convict.

The teenager listening could barely believe his ears as his father laughed about how it was impossible for Sirius Black to be a follower of the Dark Lord as he was as non-Black as a person could get. No, even if Peter Pettigrew was a traitor, at least he had done something right by framing Sirius Black as a traitor and a spy instead of letting himself be found out.

The blond boy rushed away from the door and hurried to his room, pulling out and unshrinking a silver journal as he went, turning it on and waking his raven-haired friend who was still at Hogwarts so that he could tell him about the conversation.

...

Draco: Harry, Sirius Black is innocent!

Harry: WHAT?

Draco: My parents were talking about it in the living room as I was passing, so I stopped to listen. My father says that Sirius Black is as non-Black as a person could get! Peter Pettigrew was the traitor and spy, and he framed Sirius Black!

Harry: Do you know what this means?

Draco: What?

Harry: You and I can work together to find Sirius and get him about Pettigrew so that he'll be known as innocent.

Draco: Oh! That's right! We can keep an eye out for him and then talk to him, telling him we know where Pettigrew is!

Harry: Correct. Also, think about it, Pettigrew is in Gryffindor tower... Sirius went to Gryffindor instead of Slytherin...

Draco: He's after Pettigrew!

Harry: *Grins* We know what we have to do. Thanks for telling me about this, Draco.

Draco: I'm glad I did. Now, I've gotta go. My father is coming.

Harry: Happy Christmas, Draco, and thanks. 'Night.

Draco: You too, Harry, and no problem.

As my AMAZING Beta Arnel said, "And the plot thickens..." Thanks to Arnel for the Beta and the quote. ;-)

Anyway, I've got my fifth year Harry with a shield around me just in case the H/G fans decide I'm being too evil... And Sirius fans as well! I'll be back on Wednesday, so please review. :D And don't kill me or I can't update, nor can I finish the incomplete series you all seem to be enjoying!

Posted: 4/3/11

Chapter Thirty-Five

The rest of break sped by, and before anyone knew it, the school was back. Everyone had a laugh at the twins, who were still pranked as McGonagall and Snape had decided not to help them this year. It took three weeks for it to finally wear off.

Everyone fell back into classes, and Harry and Draco told the others not to worry about keeping an eye out for Black as they would watch for him themselves. This confused the others, but they shrugged and agreed, albeit reluctantly on Tracey's part.

Nothing interesting happened until a couple of weeks after the school returned when Harry was watching the Map as he sat outside in the courtyard with Draco. They had decided to make a few stashes of snowballs as it was quite common for random snowball fights at this time of year.

"Draco!" Harry called as he stared at the Map, unwilling to look away in case the dot disappeared.

"Yeah?" he replied as he stood up and walked towards Harry.

"Sirius," was all Harry said as he stood up and took off running, Draco following just as fast.

Finally, Harry came to a stop not far from the Whomping Willow, the Map still in his hand. Draco caught up to him and stood beside him, both of them breathing heavily as they looked straight at the tree. Harry was the first to see the black dog looking out from a hole at the bottom of the tree, and his eyes widened as he figured it all out.

"He's an Animagus," he whispered to Draco quietly before walking forward a few steps and kneeling in the snow.

"Sirius?" he called to the dog. "Can you come out please, Sirius?"

The dog whimpered, and Harry saw him shake his head. Harry could only smile slightly.

"Sirius, what if I told you that we know where Peter Pettigrew is?" Harry asked. "What if I told you that we know you're innocent and that you were framed by Pettigrew?"

Both boys watched with bated breath as a black paw reached out of the tree and pressed down on a knot carefully. The tree froze and Sirius Black pulled himself out of the hole in the tree and carefully walked over to the two Slytherins. Once he was out of range of the tree, the dog stopped and suddenly a man was in his place.

As Sirius stood up, Harry saw that he was in rags, he needed a shave, his hair was covered in grime and full of tangles, but he had a smile on his face that made his eyes shine. Sirius rushed over to Harry and hugged him tightly, surprising him.

"You both really know where he is?" Sirius asked in a rushed voice, as if he couldn't believe it as he let Harry go.

"We know where he is, but we don't know how he's there unnoticed," Draco replied softly.

"He's an Animagus as well," Sirius told them both. "His form is a rat. Fits, if you ask me." Sirius spat at the ground, but Harry and Draco weren't looking at him anymore.

"Ron has a pet rat..." Harry muttered as everything began to make sense suddenly.

"And the rat is always by Ron or in his dorm..." Draco added softly.

"The twins!" Harry exclaimed. "They'll be able to get Pettigrew from Ron without any trouble!"

"That's it!" Draco agreed loudly in his happiness.

Before Sirius could say a word, Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out his Journal. He quickly activated it and wasn't surprised to see that the twins weren't on at the moment. Poking both of their names, Harry formed a group with only the two of them in it.

Fred: Yes Harry?

George: What can we do for our pranking friend?

Harry: Your brother's rat, can you get it for me?

George: Why do you need Scabbers?

Harry: Just... Please, get the rat and Stun it for me?

Fred: Sure thing, Harry, but where are you?

Harry: Whomping Willow. You'll understand soon enough. For now I just need the rat, please. And hurry.

Harry signed off without waiting for a reply, slipped his Journal back into his pocket, and looked up to see that Sirius was looking at him in confusion.

"They're Journals, and they allow anyone who has one to talk to someone else who has one," he said in explanation.

"So you were talking to these twins to get the rat?" Sirius asked curiously.

"Yes, he was," Draco replied. "Their younger brother, Ron, is the one who owns the rat. Pettigrew is his pet."

"So you're getting the older brothers to steal him as that's something older brothers do," Sirius said as he figured it out, a mischievous smile growing on his face. "You both could be Marauders with the way you think."

"What do you know about the Marauders?" Harry demanded sharply as he looked at Sirius more closely.

"Your father and I were among them, Harry."

"You, dad, Professor Lupin, and Pettigrew," Harry gasped as he figured it out, everything Lupin had been telling him suddenly making sense. "You four made up the Marauders and pranked people under the name."

Before anyone could say anything, Draco spotted the twins and made Sirius turn back into his dog form, telling them to call him Snuffles if they had to come up with a name.

"Here's Scabbers," Fred panted as he held out the Stunned rat to Harry, who grabbed him.

"Thanks," he told the twins as he glared at the rat. Pulling out his dagger from the sheath on his leg that was only noticeable to his friends who were also training with the daggers, he put the tip of it on Pettigrew's neck.

"Are you going to tell us what this is about?" George asked.

"You'll find out by tomorrow, I'm betting," Draco informed the redheads as he too glared at the rat, his wand in hand.

"Come, Snuffles, let's go inside," Harry called to the dog as the four began walking towards the castle, and Sirius followed.

"Where'd you find the dog?" Fred demanded.

"He was hiding in the snow. We thought he'd like to come inside to the warmth," Harry said, keeping a straight face as he made up a story off the top of his head.

The group was silent the rest of the way to the castle, where the twins went off to find Lee Jordan while Harry, Draco, and Sirius made their way to Dumbledore's office. When they got there, they couldn't figure out the password, so they were stuck.

"I'll go find a professor – tell them it's an emergency," Draco said as he walked down the hall, leaving Harry and Sirius alone.

Harry sat down on the floor, leaning against the wall. He placed Pettigrew on the floor in front of him and pulled out his wand, using it in his left hand as his right was still keeping the dagger on the rat. Sirius settled down next to the Slytherin and poked the hand with the dagger in it with his nose.

"You want to know why I have a dagger with me?" Harry asked Sirius. The dog nodded. "We've been training with them, to be able to fight. Voldemort is going to come back, and we need to be ready or we'll be hurt."

Sirius barked once in agreement and then settled down.

They both waited until Draco came back with Professor McGonagall a few minutes later. She was obviously shocked to see Harry with a

dagger pointed at a rat with a black dog next to him, but it probably made whatever excuse Draco had used more believable as she whispered a password and the gargoyles moved out of the way.

Both boys thanked their professor before hurrying onto the spiral staircase with Sirius, leaving her behind as they rushed to talk to Dumbledore.

...

"Enter."

Harry, Draco, and Sirius walked into the office, with only Draco looking around the room as he had never seen it before.

"Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Potter, is there something I can do for you?" Dumbledore asked, and Harry thought he could see a flicker of surprise in the Headmaster's eyes.

"You can tell us if this," he placed Pettigrew onto the desk, his wand and dagger still pointed at him, "is an Animagus."

Dumbledore's eyes widened momentarily before he pulled out his wand. He picked up the rat and placed him on the floor in the middle of his office before hitting him with a spell. Before their very eyes, the rat turned into a Stunned, fat, short, balding man.

"Peter Pettigrew," Dumbledore asked, obviously shocked by the sight. He then turned to the two smug boys, who were sharing proud and happy looks. "Did you know about this?"

"We guessed it would be him," Draco admitted while Harry murmured in agreement. "We had some hints and clues, but we still had to check to be sure."

"Sir, does this mean that Sirius Black will be cleared of all charges?" Harry asked in a rush.

He could tell that his question surprised everyone in the room including Sirius, mostly because of how he had asked it. The thing was, no one could really understand how much having Sirius would mean to him. His parents' old friend, his godfather, and the person who could be closest as a father to him since his own father was

gone. Tracey's parents were brilliant, but he wanted someone to be there for him and him alone, just for once.

"If we can find Sirius Black and find out his side of the story, which I believe will include Peter Pettigrew as the spy instead of him, then yes, he will be cleared of all charges," Dumbledore said with a small smile.

"Sir, my father said that Peter Pettigrew was the traitor and spy, but you can't tell anyone about that," Draco admitted, but it was obvious it was only because he wanted Dumbledore to believe that Sirius was innocent.

"Very well, but we still need Sirius Black," Dumbledore stated.

Harry knelt down next to Sirius and rubbed a hand through his dirty fur, not caring at all about how dirty it was. This dog was his godfather, and he wanted everyone to know that he was innocent. He looked Sirius in the eye and saw that he was willing to show himself to Dumbledore.

"Sirius Black is right here, Sir," Harry said as he continued to look at Sirius. "Can you transform, please, Sirius?"

Sirius moved away from Harry and then transformed back into a human, standing up to face his old Headmaster.

"Professor Dumbledore," he said as he inclined his head toward the older man.

"Sirius Black," Dumbledore queried, obviously still surprised by everything going on. "Is what Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Potter have said all true?"

"Yes, Professor. Peter was the Secret Keeper, not me. I convinced James to change at the last moment, and Peter told Voldemort where they were. When I found out, I chased Peter, and he cut off his own finger before transforming and running away as a rat. He killed those twelve people."

"Very well." Dumbledore seemed to have decided something as he nodded to himself. "If you'd be willing to wait here in this form, I'm going to go collect Madam Bones so that she can hear your story."

Without even waiting for a response, Dumbledore walked into the Floo and disappeared with a whispered destination.

"He's going to bring her here? When I'm human?" Sirius demanded, obviously worried.

"Don't worry, Madam Bones listens before she acts," Harry said knowledgeably, having been to Susan's house while her aunt was there a few times.

Before another word could be said, Dumbledore was back and Amelia Bones followed him through the fireplace. She got one look at Sirius and her eyes widened, but she didn't attack him just yet, probably knowing that Dumbledore wouldn't have brought her here otherwise. That was when she saw Peter. Her mouth opened and closed for a full minute before she looked up at Dumbledore.

"WHAT is going on here?" she demanded.

"Draco and I brought a rat up here and asked Professor Dumbledore if he could see if the rat was a human," Harry said quickly before anyone else could talk. "We had a hunch that the rat was Pettigrew, and it was! Before that, though, we had found Sirius, so we brought him with us and he came into the office after Draco and I had gotten Professor Dumbledore to change Pettigrew back into a human, and Professor Dumbledore went to go get you after hearing Sirius' side of the story."

"And what would Mr. Black's side of the story be?" she asked Sirius.

"I convinced James and Lily to make Peter the Secret Keeper instead of me as everyone would think it would be me, not him. We continued to make people think that I was the Secret Keeper, and all the while, Peter was telling Voldemort where the Potters were. When I found out, I chased after Peter, and he cut off his own finger, blasted the road, and turned into a rat to disappear."

Everyone looked at Peter's hand and saw that he was indeed missing a finger, which just made Sirius' claim all the more believable.

"Thank you, Harry, Draco, for bringing Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black to my office," Professor Dumbledore finally said. "I believe Amelia and I can work to fix a wrong. You may go back to your friends."

Harry and Draco knew it was a dismissal and left.

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SIRIUS BLACK INNOCENT!

PETER PETTIGREW ONE TO KILL THE TWELVE MUGGLES!

SIRIUS BLACK CLEARED OF ALL CHARGES!

PETTIGREW IN AZKABAN FOR LIFE!

In an amazing announcement, the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, announced that Sirius Black had been framed by Peter Pettigrew, who has been in hiding since November 1981. Sirius Black has been cleared of all charges and is now allowed to live his own life. He was unavailable for comment.

Turn to page 2, 3, 4, and 7 for more on Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew.

"This makes it all worth it," Harry sighed as he put down the issue of the Evening Prophet.

"Harry," Tracey whispered, catching his attention and leading him away from the rest of their friends, who were being told the story again by Draco.

"Yeah, Tracey?"

"You do know what this means, right?" Tracey looked Harry in the eye, but he was confused. "Sirius is your godfather and the guardian chosen by your parents. Remember the deal with my parents that Dumbledore made? You have to choose between Sirius and my parents for the guardianship!"

Harry stared at Tracey as he realized what she was saying. He would have to choose between the two, and he wasn't sure if he wanted to, but he knew who he would choose.

"I know who you're going to choose, Harry, so I want you to remember something. If anything ever happens, you'll always have a place at my house."

Harry smiled at his almost-twin. "Trace, I think I'll be spending as much time at your house as I will at Sirius', you know that, right?"

"I had a good guess," she replied with a smile before they headed back to their friends.

...

"Thank you, for watching over Harry when I couldn't," Sirius told Samuel and Daniella Davis as he sat in their kitchen, freshly cleaned and dressed.

"It was our pleasure," Samuel replied. "He's a good kid. A light wizard all the way, yet a Slytherin; it was a first and surprised a lot of people."

"I noticed that he seemed to be quite different from the Slytherins back when I went to Hogwarts," Sirius admitted.

"Harry is changing all of Hogwarts, really," Daniella said. "Ask him about it, and I think you'll be surprised."

"I bet I will be," Sirius muttered.

"You came here to discuss the guardianship of Harry, didn't you?" Samuel asked, wanting to get straight to the point. "Well, in this case, it's all Harry's decision. When we became his guardians, there was something added so that he could choose which of us to live with if you were ever found to be innocent."

"I see," Sirius said with a small grin.

"Truthfully, we're expecting him to choose you, knowing him, but he knows he'll always be welcomed here," Daniella admitted quietly. "Plus, I expect he'll be here almost as often as he's with you."

"Most likely," Sirius laughed. "So, is there any reason my godson feels he needs to know how to fight?"

Samuel and Daniella shared looks and Samuel turned back to Sirius. The conversation took a very serious turn from there.

...

"I'll help," Sirius declared just over an hour later. "The Black library will be a huge asset, and I'm going to help my godson however I can. Tell Daniel I'm in when it comes to finding those Horcruxes."

...

"Bloody hell, this place is a disaster," Sirius muttered under his breath as he walked through his childhood home.

Kreacher, the Black family house-elf, appeared out of nowhere, and Sirius ordered him to stay out of his way unless he was willing to help clean up the house. Kreacher left him alone.

He spent weeks getting rid of dark creatures, using magic to remove dust, mold, and dirt, and throwing out anything he didn't like. Samuel, Daniel, Daniella, and Elaine all helped him clean up his old house, knowing that while he might not end up living there forever, having a home would be better than nothing. They even managed to tear down the wall with his mother's portrait on it and replace the wall.

Sirius bought new furniture, painted the house in all of the Hogwarts colors, got normal doorknobs put in, and replaced everything in the kitchen with new supplies. Kreacher stole some of the things he was trashing, but Sirius decided to let the elf take what he wanted as long as Kreacher agreed to keep them in his room, which was agreed to.

It wasn't until Sirius was cleaning out a cupboard in the drawing room that Kreacher reacted strongly about anything.

"You cannot be taking Master Regulus' locket!" he shrieked as Sirius made to throw out the locket with a snake on it.

"Regulus' locket?" Sirius asked. "Tell me what you know about this locket, Kreacher."

"Master Regulus is making Kreacher take him to the cave and then to the island where the Dark Lord took him. Master Regulus is ordering Kreacher to go with the Dark Lord before and then to come home, so Kreacher did. Master Regulus was drinking a potion on the island, and Master Regulus is making Kreacher give it to him. Master told Kreacher to exchange the Dark Lord's locket with Master's locket when the potion was gone, so Kreacher did. Master Regulus was pulled into the lake and he did not come back. Kreacher was to destroy the locket!"

Kreacher burst into tears at that, and Sirius looked at the locket in a new light as he realized the locket might just be one of Voldemort's Horcruxes. If this was true, it meant his brother had died defying Voldemort in the end.

"Kreacher, what if I told you I know someone who can destroy this locket?" Sirius said, finally realizing that his old elf might not be as bad as he seemed.

"Master can have it destroyed?" Kreacher asked as he looked up at Sirius.

"The people who have been helping me clean the house will have to look at the locket, but if it's what I think it is, I know exactly how to destroy it," Sirius told Kreacher with a grin.

"Please, Master Sirius, finish Master Regulus' work! Please!" Kreacher exclaimed, showing that destroying the locket and being kind to the elf would truly change him.

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Hedwig brought Harry the same box as he had gotten months before about two months after Sirius had been cleared of all charges. He opened the note after giving her bacon again.

Harry,

Your godfather found this in his family home. Turns out his brother switched sides in the end and had their elf bring this home. If you

could, call out for Kreacher and allow him to watch you destroy the locket for good. He tried for years and now wants to see it break. He will not interfere or try to help; he just wants justice, and I believe he should get it. Otherwise, you know what to do.

Samuel.

...

"Kreacher?"

A loud CRACK was heard in the Room of Requirement and a very old house-elf appeared next to Harry.

"Master Harry?" the elf croaked.

"That's me. Are you Kreacher?" Harry asked.

"Yes, Master, I am Kreacher."

"Well, then, Kreacher, it's time to see Master Regulus' locket destroyed."

Harry placed the locket on the rock in the middle of the room and pulled out Slytherin's Dagger. He placed the tip right over the center of the snake carved onto the outside of the locket.

When he tried to stab the locket, the Dagger bounced off of it, and Harry frowned. He thought about why that might be happening, and then it hit him. Of course Tom Riddle would be sure that the locket couldn't be destroyed that easily.

With a sigh, Harry hissed "Open," in Parseltongue, and the locket opened. He stared at it for a moment, but once the frames started glowing red, he knew he had to stab it, so he did. Again, the locket screamed and the Horcrux was destroyed.

"It's gone, Kreacher," Harry said quietly as he picked up the locket and put it into the box again, sheathing the Dagger.

"You destroyed it Master Harry?" Harry looked at the elf to see he had a hopeful look on his face.

"Yes, I destroyed it."

"Oh, thank you Master Harry!" Kreacher croaked happily as he hugged Harry around the waist. "Is there anything Kreacher can do, or should he go back to Master Sirius?" he asked once he had let go.

"Can you take this box and a note back to Sirius for me?" Harry asked, holding up the box containing the locket while he found some parchment and a pencil.

Sirius, Samuel, and Daniel,

It's destroyed. Kreacher watched. Don't ask him how I destroyed it, or I'll have to erase your memories.

Harry

PS: Can you send the broken things back by way of Kreacher sometime? I think the girls would love to see them.

"Please bring this to Sirius, and can you not tell him how I destroyed the locket, even if he asks," Harry requested.

"Of course, Master Harry, Kreacher will keep it a secret." Kreacher bowed and disappeared with another loud CRACK.

Three down, three to go.

It's just barely after six in the morning. My laptop has a virus and is out of commission, but luckily I've had the chapters saved all over the place. XD Anyway, I'm just gunna post this now before I have to run off to that nightmare known as school. Hope you enjoyed it! Don't really have much to say anyway. Leave a review? :)

Posted: 4/6/11

Chapter Thirty-Six

The time following Sirius being cleared of all charges was chaotic in the beginning, Harry thought, because the paper had told everyone that Sirius was his godfather. Ginny had suggested he use his Invisibility Cloak to get from place to place, and he used it gratefully.

Once they had all calmed down, not all that much happened at Hogwarts. One of the few things Harry had done was convince Professor Lupin to teach him to repel Dementors because he had a feeling he would run into them again in the future. Though it took a lot of practice with a Boggart, Harry began to slowly get better and better with his Patronus Charm, the only way to repel a Dementor, until it finally turned into a Corporeal Patronus in the form of a Stag, which was his father's Animagus form. At least, that was what Sirius had told him.

When Tracey's father had sent the ring and locket back with Kreacher, Tracey, Daphne, and Astoria had been relieved to see them. It was hard for all four of them to know that Voldemort had three more pieces of his soul out there somewhere, but they took what they could.

What made it harder for Harry was showing them to Ginny, knowing they would bring up memories of the diary and the Chamber. He had been sure to show her on a weekend so that they had time to calm her down and talk about anything she needed to. Without being told, he knew she was grateful that he had done it.

When Ron had heard that Scabbers had been Peter Pettigrew in an Animagus form, he had given Hermione a note to pass on to Harry, thanking him for removing the imposter from his life. Harry took it for what it was: The beginning of a friendship.

Sirius had been sneaking into the school as Padfoot, which was what he told Harry to call his dog form, and meeting with Harry and his friends every Saturday to help them with training, for which they were all grateful. His being an Animagus already meant he could help them. Of course, he had laughed himself silly when he had found out from Harry that he and his friends were training to become Animagi as well as in fighting.

The best training session had been near the end of the year, when Sirius had come to try and help Harry and his friends become unstuck, which most had finally done in their Animagus transformations, Harry included.

...

"Now, all of you are doing quite well in your transformations, even if you are all in different parts of them," Sirius told the group of students sitting on the floor in front of him. "Something that helped me and Prongs when we were trying to transform was picturing how our forms would think, how they would sense things, and how it would feel to be that animal as well as how the actual animal felt. Now, you all try it."

Harry concentrated on getting his hands, arms, and backside to turn into a wolf, and then he began thinking about how it would feel to have the wind flowing through the fur on his body as he moved, hunting prey. Slowly, he felt changes along his body, and he kept going, thinking about being able to smell things around him and hear things he normally couldn't hear.

His eyes were closed as he let thoughts of being a wolf merge with how it would feel to be the wolf, and he felt his body changing faster and faster. He didn't open his eyes for fear of ruining his concentration, so he didn't know how much of him was changing.

Finally, he felt the sensations end and opened his emerald green eyes to turn and look at himself. Much to his surprise, Harry was looking around the room in blues and greens. Moving his head back and forth, he realized that his senses were a lot stronger than normal.

Blinking, Harry walked over to the mirror on the wall and was surprised to see that a black wolf with emerald green eyes was looking back at him. He had done the full transformation!

Barking in excitement, Harry turned around to see only a few of his friends had noticed him along with Sirius. Tracey was smiling up at him along with Ginny. Hermione had a jealous look on her face, but she also looked happy for him. Sirius looked... Sirius looked proud.

Harry's barking had gotten the attention of the others, and pretty soon everyone had seen that he had finished his transformation.

"How did you do it, Harry?" Fred yelled when he saw Harry, making Harry whimper and back away from Fred, his ears pressing down on his head.

"Fred, calm down a bit," Sirius told the redhead as he put an arm on his shoulder. "We all need to talk quietly for a bit while Harry's senses adjust. A wolf can hear better than a human, so loud noises will hurt his ears— especially because he hasn't taken his potion yet."

The reminder of the potion made Harry race over to his bag, pick it up in his mouth, and take it over to where Tracey and Ginny were sitting side-by-side. He dropped it in front of them and pushed it closer to them with his nose before smiling up at them, his tongue hanging out of his mouth as he panted slightly.

"What do you want, Harry?" Ginny asked softly, which didn't hurt his ears at all and he found it sounded as if she was using a normal voice.

"He needs the potion before he can change back, Ginny," Sirius told her. "I believe he's telling you that he's got it in his school bag and needs either you or Tracey to get it for him."

Harry barked and wagged his tail, still smiling and panting. Ginny and Tracey both realized what he wanted after that and worked together to find the vial of potion from the summer.

"Should they pour it into a dog bowl for you, Harry?" Draco asked in amusement as they uncorked the vial.

Harry growled at Draco and those snickering at his words before turning to Tracey, who had the vial in her hand, and opening his mouth for her. She smiled slightly and poured half of the vial into his mouth. Shuddering at the taste, Harry swallowed it before drinking the rest of the potion.

Once he had drunk the rest of the potion, he felt a subtle change in his senses and the feel of his form. It was as if there had been a piece missing that was there now or as if something had all been off balance but wasn't anymore. It was easier to hear things, but he

didn't think his ears would hurt from loud noises while his nose could suddenly tell the difference between his friends and different things he was smelling. His eyes could see a bit more color as well, which was useful.

"Wonderful feeling, isn't it?" Sirius asked as he kneeled next to Harry and rubbed a hand through his fur.

Harry backed away and concentrated on being human again. Once he was human again, he smiled and hugged Sirius tightly.

"Thank you!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't have gotten it that easily if it wasn't for what you said. Merlin, that is so awesome!"

"How did it feel?" Hermione demanded for the group, and Harry knew she was jealous that he had beaten her in the transformation, but none of his friends but Tracey and Ginny understood that he wanted to do this first because it made him feel closer to his father, who had been a stag Animagus.

"Do what Sirius said – concentrate on what you think the animal would be thinking, how it would feel to have the wind going through your hair, fur, feathers, or whatever you have; what would the sun, water, and anything else feel like? Just think about that sort of thing while you let the image of your animal stay in your subconscious. It'll come on its own."

Harry turned back into his wolf, which was smaller than it would end up being as he was still only thirteen and not fully grown. He then sat down and watched as his friends went back to trying to finish their transformation.

Ginny was at about the same point he had been before he had overcome his block, except she had fur that was more red than black, and she was more feline. Tracey's arms, legs, tail, and cat ears were all a light brown, but the rest of her body just wouldn't change. Hermione had everything but her head and size changed, which made her look sort of odd, but it made it more amusing.

Draco and Theo, much to Harry's growing amusement, were both in the exact same place of their transformation. The only different between them was that Draco had silvery-white fur while Theo had brownish-red.

The birds in the group had full wings and some had feathers on their heads already. Luna had a few on her body as well. All of the felines other than Ginny and Tracey had paws and arms, but they couldn't seem to get anything more yet. Fred, the monkey, had his monkey hands and tail, but nothing else while Hannah the horse had her tail and part of her mane along with the hooves. Blaise's bear was coming along in the arms and legs as well as the ears, but not much more.

Terry was getting direct instructions from Sirius as they were both dog Animagi, so Sirius could explain the feelings to him a lot easier than anyone else in the group.

...

"Harry, can you please help me get this down?" Hermione asked a couple of weeks later as she growled in frustration. She, Tracey, and Ginny were the farthest along, and they were the only ones in the room with Harry, who was practicing his knife throwing yet again while keeping an eye on them.

"Hmm..." he murmured as he tried not to growl at Hermione in frustration. She had been annoying him ever since he had gotten his full transformation to help her, but he just wasn't sure how.

"Well, all three of you are some sort of cat, right? Why don't you all try to think like a cat?" Harry suggested once Tracey and Ginny realized he was trying to help them as well.

"That would be easier if we knew what you meant by that," Ginny groaned, throwing her transformed arms in the air in annoyance, her claws coming out.

Harry's eyes widened when he saw the claws before he furrowed his brow in thought. The claws had given him part of an idea that was slowly forming in his mind, and he knew he had to voice it to get it to his friends.

"Bear with me because I've got an idea, but it's not fully formed yet," he told the three impatient girls who had recognized the look on his face.

"Go on," Hermione encouraged, wanting any help she could get.

"Well, Ginny's claws made me think... When I was transforming, I pictured hunting and the feelings that went with it, but none of your forms hunt as much as wolves do, so it doesn't help. But what all cats do is climb. Why don't you all imagine the feel of climbing a tree with the bark beneath your paws and the claws digging into the tree?

"In fact, all of you, close your eyes now and listen to my voice, picturing things as I say them, and just remember what your form looks like somewhere in your mind as you do it."

Harry watched as all three girls closed their eyes, and then he began, the perfect image in his mind now.

"Your claws are digging into the trunk of a tree, but only enough so that you don't fall off as you climb. The rough bark of the tree is digging into your paws as you hit it. All around you, the warmth of the sun is warming your fur, but a cool breeze is cooling you down as the wind blows and you move up the tree. Your fur is moving in all directions and your ears are hearing leaves move, animals moving swiftly, birds chirping, and other noises. Smells attack your nose from all sides, taking over as you ears listen and your eyes only watch the tree you're climbing."

Harry stopped as, before his eyes, all three girls began to transform fully, eyes closed.

Hermione slowly grew into a dark brown cougar. Her face gained fur even as her ears changed to a cat's ears. Her body lengthened and seemed to gain new muscles.

Ginny's reddish-brown fur grew to cover her entire body, her face turned more feline, and her body seemed to grow slightly. Her nose began twitching as it changed to a pink, feline's nose. She was truly a lynx.

Tracey slowly became the small cat he had originally seen almost a year ago when her father had told them they would get to become Animagi. She shrunk quickly, her entire body becoming smaller so that she became the size of a house cat. Her body became more feline, and the light-brown fur that had already covered her arms and

legs covered the rest of her body even as ears grew from the top of her head.

Harry transformed himself and then sat down, his head on his paws in front of him as, with amusement, he watched his friends realize they had transformed. He actually had to hold in a barking laugh as they looked from side to side in both amazement and confusion. Like him, they had felt changes, but hadn't realized how much had changed.

To Harry, it meant revenge as everyone had actually seen him as he transformed and once he had realized it, but they had pretended they hadn't. After he had found out, they wouldn't leave him alone about his reaction to the transformation, and now he could get revenge on these three.

Ginny was the first to finally get over the change and walked over to him, nudging him with her nose until he growled lightly. She hit him in the head with a paw, and he hit her back harder, which was her warning to stop, and she finally took it.

One of the things Harry had been unable to explain to his friends was how he felt once he was transformed as it was impossible to describe how much of the mind the animal took over. Unfortunately, it meant that his friends didn't realize that he felt more like an alpha in his wolf form than he did as a human. They were always calling him their leader, and that idea had passed on into his Animagus form, so he knew he was alpha of his friends and was finally beginning to understand what that meant.

Tracey padded over to Harry and Ginny, and she climbed onto Harry's back, careful to keep her claws in. She settled down into his fur and rubbed his back softly, purring.

Hermione walked over to Harry and the two girls with a look in her eyes that had him a bit worried, especially as his wolf side was warning him that she was older and felt she should be alpha. He knew that it meant her cougar side was controlling her more than she realized, but he also knew that he couldn't do much with Tracey on his back, so he stood up slowly.

Tracey must have gotten the message as she jumped off his back and she and Ginny moved away from the two larger animals. He

could almost feel the worry emanating off of them, and they couldn't turn human until they had taken their potions.

Hermione hissed instinctively at him, but Harry held back the growl that instinct was trying to let out. He knew that Hermione didn't have as good control over her animal side yet, so she needed a reminder that she was the one in charge, not the cougar. Once she had taken the potion, she would be in full control, but the animal fought for control until then.

His non-reaction was obviously confusing the cougar side of Hermione, and the human side was coming forth. She sat back, and Harry took that to mean she had enough control for him to get the potions.

Changing back to human form, he went to their bags and began grabbing the potions, making sure he remembered which was which. Once he had them all, he went to Hermione and opened her vial, pouring it into her mouth when she opened it. Next he gave Ginny her potion and finished with Tracey.

A few minutes later, all three turned back into humans, smiling happily.

"How did you know that would work to help us transform, Harry?" Hermione demanded, though not as harshly as she had been demanding before.

"Because it was similar to what I imagined, just for a different animal," he told her with a smile.

"That is brilliant!" Ginny exclaimed while Tracey walked over to Harry and put a hand on his back. They didn't need to share words for them to both know how they felt about changing.

"It really is," Harry agreed with a proud smile.

...

Over the next month, the three girls and Harry helped almost the entire group transform by each person trying to think of a scene that fit each animal or type of animal that they needed. Blaise, Neville, Hannah, Fred, and Terry were having the most trouble. Neville just

needed a bit more confidence and he would get there while the others just needed better scenes.

George helped Fred get his transformation about a week after he had turned into a raven, and Sirius helped Terry eventually get his. Blaise had gone to Harry for help as Harry was one of the largest of the group, but he was the only large one not a feline; that had helped him finally turn into a bear. Neville was able to help Hannah eventually turn into her horse, but it took her another week to get him to turn into his falcon.

Harry and his friends had made Sirius quite jealous as it had taken them less than a year to do something that had taken him, James, and Pettigrew three years, but he had admitted that having so many people, especially smart ones, would have made it easier.

The hand-to-hand combat was going so well that everyone could efficiently use both right and left sides for their daggers, sparring, grappling, wand-work, and even with their swords. They had a lot to learn still, but they could fight with either side, which was a huge advantage in a fight.

Classes had gone well with exams finally over and a week went by before they all found out their scores. The whole group felt that they had done reasonably well, though Hermione had finally admitted to Harry after he had cornered her and forced the chain of her Time Turner out of her shirt that she had been going back in time to get to all of her classes, and he made her promise to lighten her load for the next year.

Now there were two weeks until they went home, and everyone was spending a lot of time outside, enjoying the sun and nice weather.

...

"Ready for summer?" Ginny hissed to Harry one afternoon as they sat by the lake under a tree, watching their friends chase one another around.

"I'm not all that sure," Harry replied as Ankh moved up his leg to rest on his stomach so that he could enjoy the sun while hearing their conversation.

"Yeah, it would be odd to go home to a new place, even if Sirius has been coming up every weekend and a lot during the week so that you could get to know each other," Ginny admitted as she put her hand on top of Harry's and gave him a half smile that he tried to return but it was more of a half grimace.

"I know him, but I don't know him. It's almost as odd as going to live at Tracey's, but the feeling is different because no matter what her parents tell me, that house is more Tracey's than mine. With Sirius... it's going to be my actual house for once."

"But you'll have to get used to the idea first; I know," she finished for him, making his half-grimace turn into a very small smile.

Ginny was the only person who truly understood because he didn't show this part of himself to Tracey as he didn't want to hurt her feelings or anything. Ginny he could show them to, so he did.

"Thanks, Gin," he hissed, and he knew she needed no explanation.

...

Harry left a conversation with Professor Snape with a small smile. The professor had just told him about his mother from before they had known one another. It turned out that Snape had watched his mother for a while before knowing her, so he had begun telling Harry stories about that time.

The many stories of his parents from Snape throughout the year had been enlightening, even if his father wasn't a very nice person in them. Between Sirius, Professor Lupin, and Snape, Harry had gotten many different views of his parents, but his mother had always been the same between them. It had been his father who caused the most controversy between the three different people; Lupin was neutral, Snape against, and Sirius for his father.

In a way, Harry took Lupin's stories of his father as the facts, then took Sirius and Snape's views of those events and saw the different sides of them. It was a system that worked well, and it allowed him to learn about both of his parents without having to try and figure out what was lies and what was the truth.

Harry enjoyed learning so much about his parents, no matter how he learned about them.

Yes, this is going at a faster pace, but that's mostly because there's not much going on now that the Sirius plot is done. The next chapter is the final one of Becoming Alpha, so I'll see you all on Wednesday for that. Can I maybe get some reviews as a late birthday present? I had a very nice day with my friends yesterday, hanging out and swimming in the pool - perfect way to spend a birthday, in my opinion. Final thing: Thanks to Arnel from SIYE for Beta'ing this - I keep forgetting to do it here.

Posted: 4/10/11

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Tracey walked into the Room of Requirement and spotted Harry sitting alone in the middle of the room. He was just sitting there, doing absolutely nothing. She walked up until she was behind him and then stood there, doing nothing.

"Yes, Trace?" he whispered quietly, not even moving.

"You've been hiding from me," she muttered as she moved and kneeled down beside him. "Why?"

"I thought the reason was obvious," he replied, still not willing to look at her.

"Because you're moving in with Sirius," she stated, "and you feel that it's more like home than my home ever was even though you don't know Sirius as well as you knew me at the time."

"Yes," he said with a bit of a sigh.

"Harry, you aren't hurting my feelings by feeling like that." Tracey put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed slightly. "My parents are just that – my parents. Sirius is your godfather, someone who is there for you and you alone. He'll never be your father, but neither will my father. Your mother and father are dead, and my parents will take care of you as if you're my brother, but you need someone who knew your parents, who loves you as much as they did and has since you were born.

"My parents love you just as much as they love me, but we all understand that Sirius means something to you in a different way than we do. You love all of us, Harry, and you show it, but you need Sirius just like he needs you. The Davis home will always be a home for you to go to, but for now, it'll be for sleepovers and escapes when you need to get away from Sirius and his prankster ways."

Harry laughed lightly at that, obviously agreeing with her.

"No matter what, you'll always be my twin in everything but blood, Harry; no matter what," Tracey whispered in his ear as she wrapped her arms around his waist and put her head on his shoulder.

"Thank you, Trace," he whispered back as he wrapped his own arms around her waist, leaning his head on hers.

"Anytime, Harry, anytime."

...

"Tracey finally knock some sense into you?" Ginny asked as she threw herself down onto the couch next to Harry in the Gryffindor Common Room as the twins finally left him alone after planning the end of term prank.

"Oh, shut up," Harry said as he shoved Ginny lightly in the shoulder with his own.

"Ha! I knew she'd make you see sense soon enough," she crowed happily.

"I said shut up," Harry told her with a ghost of a smile on his face, trying to be serious.

"Since when do I listen to you?" she mocked lightly.

Harry growled lightly in response and hit her upside the head gently in a reminder of the day she had finally managed to transform. He had had to do that with everyone in the group so that their animal instincts knew that Harry was Alpha, but he hadn't had to do it since.

"Besides then," she amended with a nod, though she didn't stop smiling.

"Whenever you ask me for homework help?" he suggested with a grin.

"Argh! I never win with you," she groaned, unable to deny that one.

"Isn't that the point?" he asked as Ron walked by and nodded at Harry, to which Harry replied in kind.

"It shouldn't be," Ginny grumbled under her breath as she watched her brother head up the boys' staircase. Harry wouldn't have caught it before he had gotten his Animagus transformation down, but the better senses had transferred over so he could hear and smell better.

"But it is," he told her as he faced her again with a grin, earning a groan from her.

"Any plans for the summer?" she asked, obviously trying to change the subject.

"Get to know Sirius better," he began, deciding to let her have her way this time, "move into my new house, train, play Quidditch, go to other houses to hang out and sleepover, practice running around on four legs, and – what was it again? Oh yeah! – go to the Quidditch World Cup."

"You're going as well?" Ginny asked excitedly as her laughter over his way of saying use his wolf form disappeared in a flash.

"The Minister gave Sirius a couple of tickets in the Top Box and a whole bunch in the next box under it – possibly even the entire box," he told his Quidditch-crazy friend with a grin, though her brothers still didn't know she could fly, let alone play.

"Dad claims he should be able to get eight tickets easily, and he's willing to try and get a couple more if they're needed." Ginny gave Harry a curious look, and he shook his head.

"Tell your dad that enough for your family will be fine. Sirius assured me he has around thirty-five tickets, so he'll be able to get anyone who doesn't have a ticket out of our closer friends a seat in the box given to him, though I'm not completely sure if we have the entire box or not.

"Tracey and her parents are taking tickets from Sirius along with Neville and his gran, though that second one took a while. Maya, her brother, and her parents also accepted tickets. Blaise is coming without his Mum. Daphne and her family already have tickets along with Theo and his family. Draco's father managed to get three seats off of the Minister in the Top Box. Hermione managed to persuade her parents to let her go as long as she goes on a trip to France with them for a few weeks earlier in the summer.

"Otherwise, everyone else has tickets to go or they just aren't Quidditch fans," Harry finished.

"That seems to cover about everyone," Ginny agreed with a grin.

"Yeah, well, I'd better get going," Harry sighed as he stood up. "I don't want Filch to catch me out after curfew, now, do I?" He smiled at Ginny before leaving the Common Room to head back to his own.

...

"You're resigning?" Harry demanded as he looked between Sirius and Professor Lupin.

"Yes, Harry, I am resigning at the end of the year," his professor sighed.

"But – but you're the best Defense teacher we've had since I got here! You can't just leave!" He whirled to face Sirius. "Please tell me he's kidding!"

"I'm sorry Harry, but he's not joking around," Sirius said sadly.

"But why?" Harry cried out, facing his professor again.

"There are reasons that you just wouldn't understand, Harry, that are making it so that staying here for another year wouldn't be a good thing," Lupin said slowly.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me!" Harry yelled as he realized the cause of this. "Don't tell me you're leaving just because you're a werewolf!"

There was a stunned silence from both men as Harry looked between the two of them, basically glaring. In his mind, that was a stupid reason to leave, even if parents would complain – most of the students wouldn't.

"You – you know?" Lupin asked in a choked voice.

"Lots of hints and clues," Harry said with a nod. "Maybe I'll tell you when you come over during the summer... unless you're living with us." Harry looked at Sirius hopefully, not wanting Lupin to have a hard life just because of what he was.

"I've told him more than once that he had a room at our place, but he keeps on saying no," Sirius told Harry.

"What?" Harry cried indignantly. "No way, you've got to come stay with us! Sirius says we have room, I don't mind, so come and live with us at the very least!"

"You know I'm a werewolf, aren't afraid of me, don't want me to resign, and want me to come live with you?" Lupin asked weakly as he sat down, looking to be in shock.

"Well, yeah," Harry said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "You're dangerous, what, one day a month? Otherwise you're just like me, so why should I be afraid or care?"

"James and Lily's son all over," Sirius told Lupin with a smile that Lupin returned halfheartedly. "Almost exactly what your parents told him when they found out."

"I should hope so!" Harry cried.

"Does anyone else know?" Lupin asked Harry softly.

"I haven't told anyone, but I have a feeling that if you ask Hermione she'll know. Tracey might know; same with Ginny. Uh... the Ravenclaws among my closest friends might have figured it out. It's not really something that's come up," Harry admitted. "Besides, none of them have acted differently around you, so they probably don't care if they do know."

"Great," Lupin groaned quietly, but Sirius smiled at Harry.

"Please, Moony, come live with us even if you do resign," Harry begged, using Lupin's Marauder name for the first time ever.

"Well..." Lupin smiled slightly and his face regained some color as he tapped his chin lightly, pretending to be thinking hard. "I guess I can, since you called me Moony."

"Yes!" Harry cheered, punching the air happily while the two adults watched on in amusement.

"He did what I couldn't," Sirius muttered to Lupin in amusement.

"That's because he's more like Lily than James, and you're more like James than Lily," Lupin informed his old friend.

"True... True..."

...

"I am quite sorry to announce that Professor Lupin will not be returning next year," Professor Dumbledore said during his end of year announcements, looking down at the four House tables, which had been returned for the final feast. "He will be sorely missed by all of us.

"Now, please, tuck in."

Harry looked around the Great Hall and saw that most of the students were eyeing their food, plates, goblets, and silverware a little worriedly, but everyone was in good spirits despite it being the end of the year yet again.

"Time flies while you're enjoying life, doesn't it?" Tracey muttered from beside him, not even looking in his direction.

"You know me too well sometimes, Trace, and yeah, it does," he replied with a grin in her direction before he grabbed food and began eating.

"Where's the prank this year, Harry?" Theo asked from the other side of the table, drawing attention to Harry from the few of their friends who had heard.

"What prank?" Harry replied as he swallowed a mouthful of pumpkin juice.

"You and the twins almost always have a prank planned for the end of year feast, and I've seen you talking with them," he retorted sharply, knowing Harry was trying to get away with it. "What are you going to change on us this time?"

"Nothing," Harry said with a raised eyebrow.

Theo shut up when Tracey shook her head at him, and everyone continued eating with normal conversation about the summer going on all around them.

Just as everyone was relaxing near the end of the feast, obviously relieved none of them had been turned into something, four simultaneous bangs were heard, one from each corner of the Hall.

Everyone looked around to see smoke in the corners, and from the smoke emerged four animals, again one from each. One was a silver snake, another was a bronze eagle, a third was a gold lion, and the last was a black badger. Attached to the end of each animal was a black piece of fabric.

As everyone watched, the animals moved to the center of the Hall and placed the fabric so that everyone could see that the Hogwarts crest was on it, except the animals were missing. Once the four pieces of fabric, which had contained each animal's part of the crest, were completely lined up, the animals positioned themselves as they normally were on the crest. Finally, they were almost sucked into the fabric so that they appeared to be nothing more than part of the picture.

Suddenly, the four parts of the crest merged together and rose up into the air, a single piece of fabric. Still floating, the crest went above the Head Table and came to a stop in front of the wall behind the teachers, slowly moving backwards until it attached itself to the wall.

Finally, everything stopped moving, and it was obvious it was over.

There was a stunned silence for a few minutes before everyone, teachers included, began to clap. The cheering went on for a good five minutes before Dumbledore stood up and everyone fell silent.

"I believe even the teachers must agree that that was an amazing piece of magic," he said with twinkling blue eyes. "Though I'm not sure if the other professors would agree with me, I believe that something like that should earn some recognition."

Harry was a bit shocked when every single professor, Snape and McGonagall included, nodded at Dumbledore's words. He and the twins hadn't expected that when they had spent a lot of spare time in

the library trying to find all of the spells needed to pull that spectacle off. They had decided not to prank a specific person but to put on a show this year, and it seemed everyone had loved it.

"Would the people who put that together be willing to take claim for their amazing piece of magic?" Professor Dumbledore requested. "Looking at my colleagues, I believe I can safely say that none of you will be punished for that brilliant piece of work."

Harry caught the twins' eyes, and in a single moment, he knew that they wanted to do the same thing he did – tell the school that they had been the minds behind it all. The three boys silently counted down simultaneously and stood in the same movement.

"I should have known," Dumbledore mused as everyone stared at them in amazement. "Well, boys, that was an amazing piece of magic. You may just have to tell your professors how you managed to succeed in doing that, if you have the time before you leave. Now, I believe they earn another round of applause for an amazing show tonight!"

Everyone cheered for them, and it felt just as good as winning the Quidditch Cup, succeeding at his Animagus transformation, and so many of the other accomplishments he had done since getting to Hogwarts.

...

"That was amazing, Harry!" Theo exclaimed as they walked down to the Common Room after Harry and the twins had explained to all of the professors how they had managed to make the prank happen. "It also explains why you said you weren't pranking anyone – you were all putting on a show!"

Harry just smiled at his friend before entering the Common Room and heading to pack his trunk for the next day.

...

"I can't believe we've been here for three years," Harry sighed as he turned away from Hogwarts to walk to the horseless carriages that would take them to the Hogwarts Express.

"I know!" Blaise agreed. "It feels like just yesterday we heard the Sorting Hat place you in Slytherin and you started changing the school upside-down."

"That's probably because he's still turning it upside-down," Daphne said dryly. "Still, I have to agree as well; it's all gone by so fast."

"Well, at least we still have four more years to go," Draco reminded them as he joined them in their carriage moments before it left the school, wanting to avoid his group of friends.

"Do you think we'll still be friends after Hogwarts?" Astoria asked curiously, having followed her sister.

"I think we will," Harry said, though he left out the thought in his mind about how they would still be friends as long as they were all still alive then.

They were silent as they found a compartment on the train. Harry sat one seat away from the window, and Tracey sat next to him. When Ginny got there, she sat on his other side and Ankh moved onto her lap to enjoy the sun for a little while.

Others began arriving at the compartment and filled it up until Theo had to make the compartment even larger than he had when they had gotten there. Once the train left, Exploding Snap and Wizard's Chess were played all over while people talked.

"Are you okay?" Ginny asked Harry quietly in Parseltongue because he was staring past her and out the window, not doing anything.

"Just wondering what next year will bring," he told her quietly. "First year we had Quirrell trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone, so we had to keep an eye out for clues. Then we had your first year and all that happened during it. This year we had Sirius escape from Azkaban and supposedly out to kill me. I'm worried about next year now."

"What will come will come, so don't worry about it until it's here," Ginny told him. "Besides, you can do anything if you have enough nerve, and you've certainly got a lot of it."

"Thanks, Gin," he said quietly before leaning his head on her shoulder and continuing to look out the window.

"No problem, Harry."

...

"Sirius!" Harry cried as he rushed to hug his godfather, whom he had gotten pretty close to in the past six months.

"Hey, Pup!" Sirius said, using his nickname for Harry as he grabbed him in a hug as well. "How was the feast last night – and the ride home?"

"Ask Moony about the feast, and the train was fine," he replied as he let go of Sirius as smiled at him. "How are you doing?"

"Not bad, but I've got something unfortunate to show you back at the house," Sirius admitted. "I wish you didn't have to come home to this sort of news, but it's better to get it out in the open now rather than later."

"It's fine, Sirius," Harry assured his godfather. "I'd rather know what's going on than be kept in the dark."

"Go say good-bye to your friends, even though you'll all probably be talking again the moment you get home," Sirius told him with a laugh as he saw some of Harry's friends looking at him anxiously.

Harry smiled and rushed back over to his friends. The girls all hugged him while the guys hit him on the back or shook his hand, a few even giving him one-armed hugs. Harry was laughing at something one of the twins had said.

Sirius sighed sadly, wishing his godson would be able to stay this happy, but he knew that Harry would lose his happiness once he saw the article Dumbledore had sent Sirius earlier that day so that he wouldn't be surprised when he saw the Evening Prophet.

Finally, Harry said good-bye and rushed over to Sirius, who shrunk his trunk and led Harry out of the platform before pulling him into a corner and giving him a Portkey.

Harry grabbed the Portkey, Sirius activated it, and they left to go home.

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SECOND PERSON ESCAPES FROM AZKABAN!

PETER PETTIGREW AT LARGE AND DANGEROUS!

In a startling development, a second person has escaped from Azkaban, yet again connected to the same case as last time. Peter Pettigrew escaped late last night, though no one seems to know how he did it; if they do know, it's being kept tightly under wraps. Minister warns the public to keep an eye out and to be prepared for anything. Pettigrew has a wand he stole and is dangerous.

For more on Pettigrew, Black, and anything else relating to it go to pages 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11.

Fin... For Now...

Well, that's it for Becoming Alpha. Look for the story Return of an Alpha sometime Sunday. If you want, I can PM you the link once it's up.

A huge thanks to all of my readers and especially the reviewers. You all persuaded me to post this twice a week rather than only once. Just because this story might have been complete before I posted it doesn't mean you all didn't encourage me on Return of an Alpha.

Gotta thank two people, the first being Arnel. Your Beta jobs were fantastic and got me thinking about the order of my wording. The second person is who this entire story is dedicated to: My Plot Beta and best friend Ana. Without you, my friend, Becoming Alpha wouldn't have been so extensive and well thought-out, nor would this entire series have so many subplots. You alone know how much time and effort has gone into this, Ana, and for helping me through it being my plot sandpaper, I have to thank you.

I'll talk to you all again on Sunday - if you want a PM about Return of an Alpha, please just PM me or request it in your review. Now, is it too much to ask for a final review on this story?

Thanks for reading Becoming Alpha because the reviews and hit count make my day every time I see them. I hope to see you all at Return of an Alpha!

~Miriam

Posted: 4/13/11